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Freesat TV – and a fresh vision for the future

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Future Publishing Limited
2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW
Tel: 020 7042 4530 Fax: 020 7042 4539

EDITORIAL

Editor Steve May
Deputy Editor Rik Henderson
News Editor Anton van Beek
Production Editor Mark Craven
Art Editor John Rook
Tech Labs Manager Chris Jenkins

CONTRIBUTORS

Tekura Maeva, Jim Hill, Jon Thompson, Richard Stevenson,
Martin Pipe, John Archer, Alvin Gold, Sam Kleidsen

Photography Rob Monk, Kevin Nixon, Will Ireland
Creative Director Robin Abbott
Editorial Director Jim Douglas

ADVERTISING

Advertising Director Rob Elms 020 7042 4272
Advertising Manager Joe Doveton 020 7042 4256
Senior Sales Executive Julian Tozer 020 7042 4273
Sales Executive Tony Martin 020 7042 4255
Advertising Fax 020 7042 4159
London Sales Director Malcolm Stoodley
Ad Director Central Sales Jude Daniels 020 7042 4105
Ad Manager Central Sales Kerry Nortcliffe 020 7042 4153

MARKETING

Brand Marketing Manager Libby Brook

CIRCULATION

Trade Marketing Director Rachel Cock

PRINT & PRODUCTION

Production Managers Ralph Stringer, Roberta Lealand
Head of Production Richard Mason
Image manipulation James Wootton, Thadd Hendrickse,
Steven Wood
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Future
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LICENSING

Head of International Licensing
Tim Hudson, thudson@futurenet.co.uk
Tel: +44 (0)1225 442244 Fax: +44 (0)1225 732275

FUTURE PUBLISHING LIMITED

Group Publisher Pat Eggington
Publishing Director Stuart Anderton
Chief Operating Officer Simon Wear
Chief Executive Robert Price

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www.futureplc.com

Chief Executive: Steve Spring
Non-executive Chairman: Roger Parry
Group Finance Director: John Bowman
Tel: +44 (0)20 7062 4000 (London)
Tel: +44 (0)1225 442244 (Bath)

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The inaugural HCC Movie Awards, p23



WELCOME

Welcome to a very special edition of *HCC*, featuring
the first ever *Home Cinema Choice* movie awards.
If you've been wondering what Blu-ray discs are best
to show off your home cinema system, then look no
further. We've auditioned hundreds of platters to find the very
finest in picture and sound quality – not to mention uncover the
best examples of special features available and applaud the
extraordinary efforts made by studios when it comes to
remastering older classics for hi-def (p23).



We haven't forgotten about AV hardware, though, and this
issue **we have our socks knocked off by Sony's
first ever Freesat TV** (p58), go in-depth with
Arcam's amazing new AV888/P777 pre/power combination
(p52), and bathe in the beauty of Waterfall's delicious glass
sub/sat system (p76). And, with our online survey revealing that
40/42in is the most popular choice of screen-size with *HCC*
readers, we've pitched five big-brand HDTVs in that category
against each other in our no-holds-barred group test (p92).

Enjoy the show!

Steve May

TEAM HCC

Steve May:
The UK's most experienced
AV Editor with 20+ years as
a CE journo on his clock



Anton van Beek:
News Ed Anton began his
pro-videophile career over
a decade ago



Mark Craven:
HCC's Production Editor can
write shorthand – he can't
read it, though



Rik Henderson:
HCC's Dep Ed is an AV
and videogames nut – and
former TV presenter



Chris Jenkins:
Our ISF-calibrated Tech
Labs Manager is the former
Editor of *Total DVD* mag



John Rook:
Art Editor John first worked
on *HCC* back in 1999, when
TVs were made of wood



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Tech labs
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Life begins at 40!

40-42in TVs are one of the hottest AV properties around. Our megatest auditions five of the best

23 Home Cinema Choice Movie Awards 2009



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Our guarantee to you:

Equipment reviewed in Home Cinema Choice is measured and quantified by Future Tech Labs, which for more than 15 years has set the standard for independent AV test & measurement. The findings of the Tech Labs are used to underpin the subjective opinions of our Reviews team, ensuring that you receive the best-possible advice when it comes to planning your next purchase



CO-STARRING

This issue's team of expert writers are the best qualified in the business

Martin Pipe:
Technology specialist
Martin co-developed HCC's
Tech Lab operation



Adam Rayner:
The UK's foremost expert in
extreme audio writes about
bass, hi-fi and cartoons



Richard Stevenson:
Industry veteran and former
Editor of UK CE trade
journal ERT



Jim Hill:
Apple fanatic Hill is the
former editor of T3 Home
and a What Hi-Fi escapee



Jon Thompson:
Post-production specialist
whose credits include
Casino Royale and *Kill Bill*



John Archer:
The UK's most experienced
TV tester cut his teeth as an
early HCC staffer



We name the very best DVD and Blu-ray discs, movie moments, special features and ultimate AV experiences of the last twelve months

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- How the Grinch Stole Christmas** (BD)
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- Eagles Over London** (BD)
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Save money on the world's best AV mag and get a swivel-head HDMI cable and two great Blu-rays!



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BULLETIN

→ **News highlights** **EVOLVING TV** Sony reveals plans for the future of LCD **FREEVIEW HD** It's finally here, but where are the set-top boxes? **TIVO LIVES!** US PVR specialist joins Virgin Media to launch UK VOD service **FREESAT** iPlayer and ITV Player confirmed **PHILIPS** 40 and 46in LED Pro Ambilight **DEMO'D** One-stop guide to the best bits of *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen*

Spec-tacular!

Vuzix Wrap Eyewear → www.vuzix.co.uk

Vuzix's Wrap goggles are an exciting mix of geek and chic, with in-built technology letting owners watch video material on the sly. The range consists of the Wrap 230 (£130), Wrap 280 Widescreen (£180) and Wrap 920 (£250), all featuring independent focus adjustment for the twin displays, removable in-ear stereo earphones and an iPod adaptor. The Wraps are compatible with any device that has composite video-out, and the experience is claimed to be like sitting down in front of a bigscreen TV. They're even 3D-ready!



HCC Online...

Looking for breaking AV news, blogs, features, & reviews? For your daily fix visit us at www.homecinemachoice.com Follow us on Twitter @hccmag

LED light-saver

Runco Q-750 → www.runco.com

Custom install favourite Runco has embraced LED with its new QuantumColor DLP projectors. Available exclusively through distributor Pulse Marketing in the UK, the £18,000 Q-750i and £21,000 Q-750d both pack Runco's InfiniLight 'lampless' LED illumination technology (which claims a 70 per cent reduction in power use against standard lamps) alongside an exhaustive colour management suite promising 'unrivalled customisation'. The Q-750d ships with Runco's latest DHD external controller/processor.



Partner with...

**Loewe BluTech Vision
Interactive**
Premium Blu-ray player
£700 approx



To feed your new projector you'll want a good HD source, which is where Loewe's latest BD-spinner comes in. The German AV marque's second hi-def player is BD-Live compatible (with 1GB of internal flash memory) and promises to be 'one of the fastest players on the market' thanks to a claimed disc-loading time of 14 seconds. www.loewe-uk.com

Five million:1 shot



Following its cutting-edge 21:9 TV, Philips is now intent on wringing the best out of LED tech.

Its new 9704 range promises to set 'a new reference standard for TV performance' thanks to its new LED Pro technology. This increases the LED segments by 75 per cent; each now lights a smaller screen section meaning more dimming within the image and a claimed dynamic contrast ratio of 5,000,000:1. The 40PFL9704 and 46PFL9704 are available now for £1,800 and £2,500 respectively.

TiVo lives!



Virgin Media has entered a strategic partnership with TiVo for a 'converged television and

broadband interactive interface' to power the UK media giant's next generation of HD set-top boxes. 'TiVo's proven track record of innovation, strength of its patented technology and experience in developing best-in-class user environments make it an ideal partner for Virgin Media,' says Virgin Media CEO Neil Berkett.

The first co-branded boxes should arrive in 2010.

Age of Aquarius



Described by IsoTek founder Keith Martin as 'the most cost-effective

upgrade an audio lover is ever likely to make', the company's new Aquarius mains conditioner costs around £800. It sports two high-current and four medium-current outlets, all individually filtered and isolated, new aluminium casing, KERP (Kirchoff's Equal Path of Resistance) tech that promises a pure symmetrical signal path through the unit and 67,500 Amps of instantaneous and repeatable surge/spike protection. Wallop!

Playlist...

Team HCC reveals its Playback picks of the last month

1 Defying Gravity (BBC HD)



Sci-fi yarn with stunning visuals is probably the best-looking HD import around. *Steve May*

2 District 13: Ultimatum (Region B BD)



Haiku: French men running wild, mental but brilliant stunts. Parkour suits Blu-ray! *Rik Henderson*

3 Happy Tree Friends (R2 DVD)



Grotesque but hilarious 'toons make the perfect antidote to saccharine Xmas TV. *Mark Craven*

4 Trick 'r Treat (All-region BD)



This sensational horror missed out on a UK hi-def release but the all-region US Blu-ray makes up for it. *Anton van Beek*

5 Top Gear (BBC HD)



The boys are back on form with super shiny cars and trekking across Europe. Where are my keys? *John Rook*

Sony pledges Evolving TV

Upgradable feature sets and 3D vital to brand's LCD success

Innovation and evolution are at the heart of Sony's plans for the future of its struggling TV business. The company, which is forecasting a 95 billion yen loss for the current financial year, believes that the introduction of emerging 3D technology and network applications will help it capture a 20 per cent share of the worldwide LCD TV market by 2012, according to Chief Executive Howard Stringer.

Speaking to analysts, Stringer outlined four strategies that the company is now following: targeting consistent profitability in core hardware businesses (TV, game and digital imaging); providing new user experiences to integrate innovative hardware, software and services; reaching out to new customers and developing new geographic markets; and increasing Sony's focus on environmentally-conscious products. However, he also admitted that while, 'our working is already bearing fruit... we still have more work to do'. The first steps towards the future of Sony's TV can be seen in our in-depth review of the company's debut Freesat LCD on p58.

Stringer has already overseen a restructuring of the company, resulting in eight shuttered factories, a 12 per cent



Sony's Chief Executive Howard Stringer says the brand has 'work to do'

reduction in workforce and a 500 billion yen saving in procurement costs, but he

indicates that the key to the future is what Sony is dubbing 'Evolving TV' – that's to say screens that can be upgraded by applications over a network. Looking forward, Stringer predicts that 3D TV and Blu-ray players will bring in 1 trillion yen by March 2013. He also confirmed that existing PlayStation 3 consoles are firmware-upgradable to support 3D.

In related news, the PS3 recently took a step closer to becoming the home entertainment hub that the company has always claimed it was intended to be. The tail-end of November saw the launch of the PlayStation Network movie download store in the UK and selected European territories, with an initial choice of some 800 films from Hollywood heavyweights, as well as the promise of UK-exclusive content from the likes of Optimum Releasing and E1 Entertainment.

Movies down the line

Unlike the 1080p streaming service recently launched for Microsoft's Xbox 360, the PSN proposal is based around consumers downloading a DRM-laced file to the PS3's HDD. While Sony admits this is a lengthy process, taking several hours on a good connection, viewers will be able to start watching their movies shortly after the download begins.

With a mixture of new releases and old favourites available to buy or rent, there's a range of pricing options. Initial reports mentioned prices from £2.50 to rent and £6.50 to buy, but this appears to apply only to back-catalogue titles. Newer content is expected to retail for closer to £12, and HD content also costs more than SD.



Sony hopes 3D will drive LCD sales

Demo'd!

This issue, the Blu-ray highlights of...
Transformers: 2

Stars in your ears

00.25: Go to the Paramount logo at the start of the film, with the digitised sound of the stars sweeping across the soundstage, to get an idea of how strong the positional effects are in this DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix.

Biker babe

10.48: The Blu-ray's AVC 2.40:1 encode doesn't just excel at reproducing the film's insanely detailed CGI robots, it also handles subtler flesh tones with ease, as demonstrated by this memorable shot of Megan Fox.

Prime'd for action

59.19: Optimus Prime's fateful showdown with Megatron and his Decepticon chums provides ample chance for the disc to show its talents, with staggering Full HD visuals and the tight bass and precisely-steered audio of the inventive lossless mix.

Run like the wind

127.13: As Shia LaBeouf and Megan Fox's characters run through Egyptian ruins dodging armies of battling 'bots you'll feel right there – gunfire ricochets around, lasers blast across the soundstage and explosions rock your world with mammoth LFEs.

Freeview's theoretical launch

No kit available to access new service until next year



If Freeview HD launches, but there are no set-top boxes

available, has it really launched at all? This is the rather embarrassing situation that Freeview HD is in following the soft-launch of the service in specific regions of London and Manchester on 2 December.

The hardware shortage seems to stem from the tight timeline manufacturers have had to work with, following Ofcom's adoption – and fast-tracking of – the DVB-T2 standard and MPEG-4 compression, which allows an expanded range of HD services to be squeezed into the six existing Freeview multiplexes, with the loss of only a handful of existing standard-definition channels. All the channels also had to rollout in a manner that fits in with the fixed schedule for the Digital Switchover.

BBC stretches reality

The upshot of this is that while HCC has attended a demonstration of Freeview HD at the BBC Television Centre to celebrate the launch, there is simply no way at present for consumers in the relevant regions to actually access the service.

Graham Plumb, head of digital technology at the BBC Operations



Humax's FOX-HD-T2 should appear early 2010

Group, says that, 'We knew it was a real stretch for the manufacturers, but it looks like they have done it'. Yet none of the manufacturers HCC has contacted have kit that's available to buy. Humax, which showed a prototype of its FOX-HD-T2 box at the IBC exhibition in 2009 and has since demoed the unit to the press, states that it will not retail until 'early 2010'. Likewise, major market-player Pace is aiming for a similar release, but admits that an integrated circuit it utilises is only due to arrive for production in January, and after that it will have to go through a validation phase with the Digital Television Group to ensure that it's suitable for a Freeview HD badge.

Other set-top box and PVR manufacturers have been talking about entering mass production in April, while TV manufacturers

such as Panasonic have only been willing to admit that IDTV products with integrated Freeview HD tuners are 'on the roadmap', but are currently unable to confirm when they'll be launching.

So while Freeview HD is proudly trumpeting the success of this 'soft-launch', nobody, even those living in the two relevant regions, can actually access it at the moment. This makes this less of a launch – no matter how 'soft' Freeview might consider it – and more of a test run to ensure that everything runs smoothly before the real rollout begins in Spring 2010, in the build up to the start of the FIFA World Cup in June.

Tartan feels the Thirst



The reborn Palisades Tartan label is going for the jugular with the UK release of Korean filmmaker

Park Chan-wook's *Thirst*.

The *Oldboy* director's latest film – not to mention his first foray into the ever popular world of vampire cinema – hits DVD and Blu-ray over here on January 25. Priced around £20 and £25 respectively, it's accompanied by a commentary from the director, the trailer and a UK-exclusive interview.

Whiteout out



The comic book adaptation *Whiteout* comes to DVD and Blu-ray in the UK on January 25, courtesy

of Optimum Home Entertainment. This high-concept thriller stars Kate Beckinsale as US Marshal Carrie Stetko, who discovers that temperatures as low as 120 degrees aren't the only hazard she has to worry about when she's called upon to solve Antarctica's first homicide. Both the DVD and BD releases will include two *Making of...* featurettes, deleted scenes and the theatrical trailer.

Hi-def horror



There's good news for fans of Italian horror maestro Dario Argento, as his cult masterpiece *Suspiria*

is coming to Blu-ray in the UK on January 18. Nouveaux Pictures and Cine-Excess have overseen a brand-new hi-def digital remaster of the '70s chiller, which is also being used for a new DVD release that will hit streets on the same day. New extras include a retrospective documentary featuring Argento and composer Claudio Simonetti, plus a commentary by horror experts Alan Jones and Kim Newman. ➤

The image shows five Eclipse TD speakers arranged in two rows: two in the top row and three in the bottom row. Each speaker is a glossy black sphere with a silver-colored base and a prominent white circular driver in the center. They are set against a dark, reflective background.

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Pick'n'mix

British filmmaker Jake West takes us through his five favourite DVDs...



1 Blade Runner: CE

Five-disc essential edition with all flavours and enough extra bits to make a Nexus 7!

2 Phantasm Sphere

I directed the *Phantasmagoria* documentary and met my heroes. The essential complete collection.

3 The Prisoner

Don't be a number, be a free man and see the best TV series ever made in pin-sharp Blu-ray glory!

4 Evil Aliens: CE

This rare 2-disc German release of my second film is the best edition of my work available on DVD.

5 Lord of the Rings: Collector's Editions

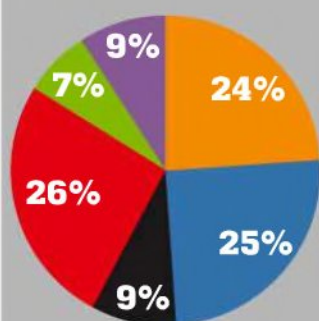
I'd have to mark these out as some of the best DVD releases of all time. They set the benchmark for content and presentation.

Writer/director Jake West's *Doghouse*, is available to buy now courtesy of Sony Pictures on both DVD and Blu-ray. Also, his DVD label Nucleus Films, has released the classic Bettie Page films *Varietease* and *Teaserama* on DVD in the UK.

We asked...

Just how big is the primary home cinema screen in your home?

- 60in or above
- 50/52/55in
- 46/47in
- 40/42in
- 37in
- 32in or below



Results from www.homecinemachoice.com
Go online for more polling action

Freesat plans player power

ITV Player to follow iPlayer early in 2010

Freesat's managing director Emma Scott says she's feeling confident about Freesat's chances following the launch of Freeview HD, as the satellite platform announced the addition of BBC's iPlayer to its service and its intention to add ITV Player in the first half of 2010.

Delivered via broadband, iPlayer will initially be made available to owners of all Humax Freesat HD boxes as early as this Christmas, following a closed beta trial. The service will then be rolled out for owners of all Freesat HD boxes and TVs in early 2010.

'Getting the first on-demand service on Freesat is a big milestone for us,' says Scott. 'We've got ITV Player coming as well and that's partly down to the position of broadcasters that on-demand on a big TV is the way forward.'

Red alert

Accessed by pressing the red button while watching a BBC channel, up to 450 BBC shows will be available at a time on Freesat in standard-definition, using an interface similar to the PlayStation 3 version of iPlayer. Users will need a 2Mb broadband connection to watch video in high-quality or 1Mb for a low-quality stream.

Variable broadband speeds permitting, HD-on-demand isn't ruled out for the future, but Scott says Freesat is unlikely to introduce a via-satellite 'push' VoD overnight download service, as currently used by Sky.

'Push over satellite is a pretty expensive way of doing it, though you can do pay-per-view and so forth. Getting more HD-on-demand is down



'On demand on a big TV is the way forward,' says Freesat MD Emma Scott

to the situation with broadband in this country. There's the capability to do it but it's down the other end of the chain that comes the trouble.'

Added Scott: 'I think when we produce a Project Canvas Freesat box next year – hopefully – maybe HD VoD via broadband is something that will come to pass.'

Regarding the launch of rival service Freeview HD, Scott seems unfazed by the impact it may have on Freesat.

'I think the fact the World Cup will be available on Freeview HD is great, but the key difference is that Freesat will be available across the UK and you can get it anywhere. We haven't got issues with transmission or aeriels.'

'We're really lucky in that we will have an install base of over a million HD homes by the time Freeview HD launches. People will understand that we've got it built into TVs, we know it

works and it'll work across the UK. I think having iPlayer and ITV Player as well is another great value add.'

As for future developments Scott is noncommittal.

'We've got a road map for future innovations and will add more functionality and content later on.'

Playtime begins:

BBC's iPlayer will be available on Freesat – but not the hi-def content



Super audio



Denon is pushing its audiophile credentials with a new high-end stereo SACD player. Priced around £1,700,

the heavyweight (14kg) DCD-2010AE has a new Advanced SVH Mechanism with a low centre of gravity and anti-vibration tray. Sound quality is aided by Advanced AL32 Processing and high-grade 32-Bit/192kHz DA converters. It promises CD, SACD and CD-R/RW (MP3 and WMA files) support with a front-mounted USB port for an iPod/iPhone, or streaming digital music files from a USB drive.

Onkyo adds DAB



Onkyo continues to make good on the promise of the Universal Port the company fitted to

eight of its AV receivers released in the past year. The port was designed to allow users to daisy-chain additional modules to expand their home entertainment options. Following on from the UP-A1 iPod/iPhone dock, Onkyo has now released the £130 UP-DT1 module, a DAB+ tuner that is powered by the receiver, offers 40 station presets and can be controlled via the AV receiver's remote control.

Store in style



Loewe has introduced two new AV storage kits to its home cinema lineup. The Loewe Individual

Rack 110.30 is designed to partner 32-42in TVs from the Art and Connect lines, and has a drawer that stretches across the width of the unit front, which can be used to store DVDs or CDs, along with two extra shelves. The larger Individual Rack 165.30 is for use with its namesake screen range (32-46in) and offers extra storage for the Individual Sound Subwoofer alongside your discs and peripherals. Prices start at £1,200.

This month's top ten news stories in handy, bite-sized chunks...



Meridian curries Thai favour

1 Paragon of home cinema
Renowned British AV manufacturer Meridian recently opened its first concept store. But before any UK-based home cinema buffs get excited about popping down to check it out, the bad news is that it's located in Thailand's exclusive Siam Paragon shopping complex as part of the company's ongoing plan for international expansion.

2 Swap shop
In the US, Warner Bros. is boosting Blu-ray adoption by allowing consumers to trade in DVDs against Blu-ray versions of the same film. Run through WBshop.com, you simply select the title(s) you want to trade, send off the DVDs with \$7.95 per film plus shipping, and a few weeks later a shiny new BD version will arrive in the post. Sadly, no word yet on a UK scheme.

3 Stone the crows
Worried about how long your DVD-based file back-ups will last? Well, US company Cranberry LLC has come up with an alternative to DVDs traditionally made from degradable plastic. Its new DiamonDisc is made from synthetic stone, can be played in any DVD player or drive and will apparently last for 1,000 years!

4 Raging Blu
Movie buff Martin Scorsese is also a huge fan of Blu-ray. The *Taxi Driver* director gave a speech at the recent Blu-Con 2.0 conference in the US praising Blu-ray for offering 'the best possible sound and picture' and presenting 'film-grain quality' akin to 35mm stock.



Marty loves BD

He also admitted that his fave BD is *The Searchers*, saying, 'You put it on to check something out, and you can't take it off'.

5 The Big Bang
In what as being described as 'the largest entertainment launch in history', controversial videogame *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* racked up worldwide sales of \$550million in just five days. By comparison, blockbuster movie *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* could only conjure up \$394million during the same period on its cinema release.

6 'To have and to hold'
A Japanese man going by the name Sal9000 has become the first person, and hopefully the last, to marry a video game character. The pixel-struck geek tied the knot with sexy sprite Nene Anegasaki, from the Nintendo DS game *Love Plus*, in Tokyo in November.

7 Phone home cinema
Universal Studios has unveiled an iPhone/iPod Touch app called Pocket BLU that allows advanced Blu-ray disc navigation and social networking functionality on an upcoming range of US Blu-ray releases including *Inglourious Basterds*. The app also lets users interact with BD-Live content.

8 Chips with everything
Onkyo has inked a deal with Intel to co-develop motherboards for AV use. The company believes that by using chips designed for PCs in its home cinema hardware, it can both control development costs and more easily build internet functionality into its next-gen AV and hi-fi kit.

9 Energy crisis
Despite howls of protest from the consumer electronics industry, the California Energy Commission has voted unanimously to outlaw TVs that do not comply with strict energy guidelines. All new TVs with screen sizes up to 58ins will need to be more energy-efficient from 2011, with more draconian requirements kicking-in from 2013: in practice this means that 42in TVs must use less than 183W by 2011 and less than 116W by 2013.

10 Wharfedale whoopsie
In last issue's grouptest, we accidentally printed the specs for the Diamond 10.1 satellites, not the Diamond 10.0 satellites on review. The person responsible has had their knuckles wrapped with heavy-gauge speaker cable.

Premiere

HCC's guide to what's happening in the world of TV and films...

Angels delight



You just can't keep a good Angel down. ABC is reportedly pushing ahead with a brand-new *Charlie's Angels* TV series to air next year. While casting is yet to begin, *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicle*'s Josh Friedman is gearing up to write the revamped show.

Disney sinks Nemo

Disney's long-gestating remake of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* is on ice. The House of Mouse recently announced it has shut down development and that director McG was now off the project. No great loss there then!

Frank's back

Paul WS Anderson and Universal Studios are racing ahead with a straight-to-DVD *Death Race* prequel, naturally without the involvement of star Jason Statham. Titled *Death Race: Frankensteins Lives*, the film will tell the story of the creation of the sport and the origin of titular driver.

Hopkins hammered

Anthony Hopkins is the latest star to join the cast of comic book adaptation *Thor*, where he'll play the king of Asgard, Odin. The superhero flick, helmed by Kenneth Branagh, already counts Natalie Portman and Stellan Skarsgard in its cast, as well as *Home and Away*'s Chris Hemsworth as the titular hero.

Dollhouse no more



Joss Whedon's troubled TV series *Dollhouse* has been axed by Fox. The show, which surprised many by having a second season, has struggled to pick up viewers in the US and will end after the 13th episode of the current season.



POINT OF VIEW

Richard Stevenson is now the 7,233rd person to wonder whether 3D is worth all the hype and hullabaloo

As a tech geek, I'm probably not supposed to say this, but I will anyway: 3D sucks. In fact, it sucks so much I can't believe so many companies are betting their budget on 3DTV becoming the next big thing.

IFA this year, Japan's CEATEC and no doubt next January's CES will be jam-packed with 3D technologies vying for your consumer Euro, Yen or dollar, yet this headlong rush into 3D smacks of desperation. Are the TV manufacturers clutching at the straws of an initially 'wow' technology simply to fuel the next wave of upgrade sales?

I've seen so many demonstrations of 3D video technology over the past two decades I can't remember who does what anymore. Some have been pretty darn good (DLP 3D with LCD shuttering being the best so far, in my opinion) and many have been dire – anything that involves binocular chroma-separation, in fact. If I want to spend my evenings seeing red with one eye, green with the other and going to bed with a headache you can measure on the Richter scale, I'll start drinking Kronenbourg 1664 again.

And it's not just the TV-makers jumping on the bandwagon. **Broadcasters are sticking their oar in**, with both Sky and the BBC getting very public about their 3D intentions.

Now, with such weight of corporate might pushing in the same direction, I thought 'maybe I'm wrong.' So I settled down to *Coraline* in 3D (Blu-ray) with a pair of cardboard glasses perched on my hooter. I only managed half an hour before the awful stereo colour-filtering got the better of my constitution.

The filtering robs the picture of any colour depth or saturation. No matter how long I spend trying to form a single image, my brain continues to register one all-green image and one all-red one haphazardly laid on top of each other with a horizontal shift. Worse still, the actual depth perspective is only visible on major objects relative

to each other and not on the detail of the objects themselves. While *Coraline* herself might be in the foreground relative to the scenery, her face is as flat as a pancake. It is, as I have previously ranted about, the *Captain Pugwash* effect.

And it's not just from a performance aspect that I believe 3D will fall flat. As long as viewers are required to wear glasses it isn't going to be mainstream. Come on the AV industry! Wake up and smell the coffee that was brewed some 20 years ago. No one wants to wear silly glasses when watching *EastEnders*, the news, or *The Simpsons*. Most UK families socialize around the TV, talking through the day with background entertainment. Can you imagine the Royal Family all wearing 3D glasses in front of the telly?

Of course, there are one or two interesting technologies that allow 3D viewing without some form of eye-wear, but the tech is difficult to implement on a mass-market TV. Moreover, it is near impossible to broadcast the content, as these data-massive 3D formats need enormous bandwidth. So what all the TV-makers and broadcasters are currently working towards and shouting about with unbridled enthusiasm are 3D formats requiring not-so-trendy specs.

So, in the short- to mid-term, 3D video is fundamentally flawed, and a retrograde step in picture quality. It's coming to market not on its merits but due to desperate manufacturers wondering what the hell they are going to do when the novelty of HD wears off. I predict that this first wave of 3D, slated for launch in 2010, will be one of the biggest flops in the history of consumer electronics.

When my headache finally subsides I shall try *Coraline* on Blu-ray once more – this time in 2D with all the amazing colour, detail, definition and depth that great 1080p HD video brings ●

For more of Richard Stevenson's ramblings log on to www.homecinemachoice.com/points_of_view

Richard Stevenson would be the first to admit that his hooter is probably big enough for two pairs of 3D glasses





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DVD ADDICT

The Beek explains why 2010 should be a good year for Blu-ray, with sci-fi horrors, Hobbit-filled adventures and lavish musicals all on the way

The nights have gotten longer, there's a chill in the air and the HCC Team is arguing over who ate the last After Eight. All of which can only mean that the Christmas break is upon us, and with it the death of 2009. Normally, I'd be casting my eye back over 12 months of software releases, but seeing as we've done just that in our new, exciting *Home Cinema Choice Movie Awards* (p23), I'm turning my attention to the year ahead – the oh-so futuristic-sounding 2010. What, exactly, does a self-confessed DVD Addict have to look forward to?

Not my scene, man

Obviously, the hottest topic of all is 3D, which Hollywood has decided is the future of cinema (and by association, through 3D BD, the future of home cinema). I personally remain unconvinced by the idea of 3D as a viable format, but I'm not going to waste too much space on it here (see *Point of View*, p14, for a more detailed, hysterical, knee-jerk diatribe from my colleague Richard Stevenson). Anyway, the truth is that 3D's ultimate success or failure rests in the hands of one man – HCC editor Steve May. Based on his track record in the HD DVD vs BD battle, you can guarantee that whatever side of the 3D debate he eventually comes down on, the actual outcome will be the total opposite.

The real excitement for me is the back-catalogue Blu-ray titles that have been teased for release in 2010. Pick of the bunch is the *Alien* boxset. This is by far my favourite movie franchise, and 20th Century Fox already did incredible things with the sci-fi saga on DVD. However, rumour has it that the Blu-ray box set (potentially re-titled *Alien Anthology*) will add more newly-discovered material to what was already one of the best collections of extra features ever assembled.

Hopefully, they'll leave space in the pack for the *Alien* prequel that's in production...

With a *Star Wars* BD still off the table for the foreseeable future (remember how long it took Lucas to bring his saga to DVD?), the most anticipated blockbuster franchise awaiting release is undoubtedly Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings*. Originally scheduled for its Blu debut towards the end of '09 (in theatrical cut form only), the Elf-tastic trilogy has been postponed until 2010. If they're still only talking about the theatrical cuts of the movies, I'd happily have them leave it even longer. Given the capabilities of the Blu-ray format, I reckon the ideal solution is a BD50 for each movie (containing both cuts via seamless branching) and the audio commentaries, and then an additional BD25 platter for each instalment, housing the supplementary material from both the theatrical and extended releases.

It'd also be nice to see those last few titles that were available on HD DVD, but not on Blu-ray, make the jump to the victorious format. **How much longer must I keep my blasted Toshiba HD DVD player** just so I can watch the likes of *Forbidden Planet*, *Grand Prix*, *Tremors* and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* in hi-def?

But the thing I'm looking forward to the most in 2010 is the Blu-ray of *Moulin Rouge!* Baz Luhrmann has been overseeing the production of this disc for some time now and – whatever your opinion on musicals – if you can think of another title that has the potential to deliver a similar impact in terms of HD visuals and lossless audio in the next twelve months, I'll eat my diamond-encrusted basque ●

For more wit and wisdom from *The Beek* go to www.homecinemachoice.com/dvd_addict

Anton van Beek claims his favourite movie franchise is *Alien*, but we all know it's *Mighty Ducks*. Still, he wasn't lying about the basque



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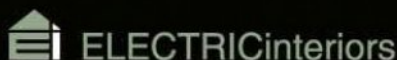
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DEEP FOCUS

Hollywood insider **Jon Thompson** celebrates the power of net-savvy movie critics and urges more to do the same

In today's world, words seem to be more powerful than ever – governments and corporations fear people's opinions. Indeed, this very magazine is a whole series of carefully considered opinions.

There is, though, a more recently-emerged outlet for opinions that has put the fear into governments, corporations and movie studios – Twitter. The fashionable art of 'micro-blogging' has wound up the major Hollywood studios something rotten. Previously, when you had a bad film, you put it in plenty of screens and by the end of the three-day weekend you had made some money. In our 21st-century world, that does not work – people see it on the Friday and immediately 'tweet' that it is a stinker, so those even going to late shows that first day can abort and watch something else. The speed at which a movie can now die is staggering.

You can see why this can cause concern to the old school. Even with cinemas moving to digital technology – and almost eliminating the production costs of individual prints – you still have your marketing spend. Take a film like Roland Emmerich's *2012* – its world-wide marketing costs are going to be well over \$100 million. So, with money like that floating around, a few well-placed words/tweets can easily spoil a studio exec's breakfast.

Twitter seems to break down into three groups: celebrities promoting something or themselves; people trying to sell you something; and Joe Public. The only people interested in his tweets are his friends – and even then they're not *that* interested – but when Joe says that Movie X is a pile of twaddle, it seems to rip through the Twittersphere like a plague of locusts.

People's choice

I reckon this means the days of movie critics are numbered. The likes of Jonathan Ross (who has

never been able to give depth to a film review in the way Barry Norman could) are surely over. With Ross it is about him, not the movie he's watched or the celebrity he is interviewing. He is the celebrity himself. Much of the media has forgotten how to report on an event without interrupting or disturbing it. Now the audience has picked up on this, and values the opinions of its peers via feeds such as Twitter. Big names can be bought, but Joe Public on Twitter can't, so you can see where the fear of such services comes from. In Iran the government is policing the internet in an attempt to weaken the voice of the political opposition, but **no matter how rich and powerful the big studios are, they can't shut down the 'net if they get a bad review.**

They can employ people to counter blog, but that seems not to work. Probably because one lone voice against a mountain of angry tweets stands out like a sore thumb.

Speak your brains

Mainstream media has always been tightly controlled in all countries around the world, which is why satire became important, as it was a coded way of having a go at the establishment. Of course, not all of us can carve out a career as the next Jonathan Swift, Mark Twain or Matt Groening, but we can all have our say. So, next time you go and watch a movie and think 'Was it worth it?' get online, and send some ripples around the world. If you hate a movie, always say why, and be proud you have an opinion. Likewise, if you think the quality of a Blu-ray disc is poor then say so. It's always better to have said something rather than nothing and, who knows, we might just end up with better-quality movies and disc releases as a result ●

Are you interested in what professional movie critics have to say? Let us know: email hcc@futurenet.co.uk

As a post-production expert, **Jon Thompson's** movie credits include *Casino Royale*, *Children of Men* and *Mission: Impossible 3*





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Tech diary

The world of AV and film changes fast. **HCC's calendar** is here to make sure you don't miss out

Sorority Row:
The new teen
horror hits BD,
January 4



Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
				18 <p>Avatar</p> <p>The most hyped movie of the year opens at UK cinemas today. That's right, James Cameron's long-awaited sci-fi 3D spectacular is almost here. Have you pre-booked your tickets? www.avatarmovie.com</p>		
				25 <p>Merry Christmas!</p> <p>Exchange gifts, stuff yourself with turkey and mince pies, and settle back for another afternoon of <i>EastEnders</i>, <i>The Queen's Speech</i> and, in all likelihood, more <i>Doctor Who</i></p>	26 <p>Sherlock Holmes</p> <p>Director Guy Ritchie returns to UK cinemas Boxing Day with his take on fictional detectives Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson. If the trailer is anything to go by, it should be a real treat www.warnerbros.com</p>	27 <p>Happy Birthday!</p> <p>Aussie stunner Emilie de Ravin was born on this day in 1981. Best known for playing Claire Littleton in the hit TV series <i>Lost</i>, she can next be seen in the upcoming action comedy <i>Rogue's Gallery</i> www.roguesgallery-movie.com</p>
28 <p>District 9</p> <p>Neill Blomkamp's astonishing sci-fi movie hits DVD and Blu-ray in the UK today – perfect if you've still got some Christmas cash you haven't already blown in the Boxing Day sales www.d-9.com</p>			31 <p>New Year's Eve</p> <p>What does the AV world have in store for us in 2010? We can't know for certain, but whatever it is, we bet it'll be exciting – maybe a 3D technology that won't make our heads hurt...</p>	01 <p>Post Grad</p> <p>If you've already fried your synapses with <i>Avatar</i>, this light-hearted comedy – about a young college graduate trying to placate her eccentric family while looking for a job – might soothe them foxsearchlight.com</p>		
04 <p>Sorority Row</p> <p>An accidental death caused by a prank going wrong leads to a group of (probably attractive) Sorority sisters being stalked by a serial killer. Buy this new teen horror on DVD and Blu-ray in the UK from today thetapi-ordie.com</p>	05 <p>High fidelity</p> <p>FM radio was first demonstrated to the Federal Communications Commission in the US on this day in 1940. It was initially assigned the 42-50MHz band of the spectrum, but was later moved to its current spot at 88-108 MHz</p>	06 <p>Tanjoubi omedetou!</p> <p>Celebrated Japanese video game designer Yuri Horii was born on this day in 1954. The creator of the best-selling <i>Dragon Quest</i> franchise, he is credited as developing the blueprint for console-based role-playing games</p>	07 <p>2010 International CES</p> <p>The world's biggest AV and tech show kicks off today at the Las Vegas Convention Center and The Venetian and runs until January 10. <i>HCC</i> will be there – will you? www.cesweb.org</p>	08 <p>The Road</p> <p>Almost a year later than originally expected, this adaptation of Cormac McCarthy's post-apocalyptic tale starring Viggo Mortensen finally arrives in UK cinemas this Friday www.the-roadmovie.com</p>	09 <p>Milestone</p> <p>Independent film <i>Mile Post 398</i> was released on this day in 2007. The flick was a milestone in US cinema history – the first to be produced, directed, written, filmed and acted by an all-Navajo team www.sheepheadfilms.com</p>	10 <p>About Time</p> <p>Entertainment and media conglomerate Time Warner was born on this day in 1990, thanks to the merger of Time Inc. and Warner Communications, although the change of name didn't happen until early the following year</p>
11 <p>The Taking of Pelham 123</p> <p>Tony Scott directs Denzel Washington and John Travolta in this flashy remake of the 1974 cult favourite. Catch it on DVD and Blu-ray in the UK this Monday www.sonypictures.co.uk</p>			14 <p>HCC #178</p> <p>Start saving your pennies for <i>HCC</i> #178. Your favourite home cinema magazine hits the stands this Thursday, packed with hardware tests, installs, features, outspoken opinions and full-on software reviews www.homecinemachoice.com</p>			

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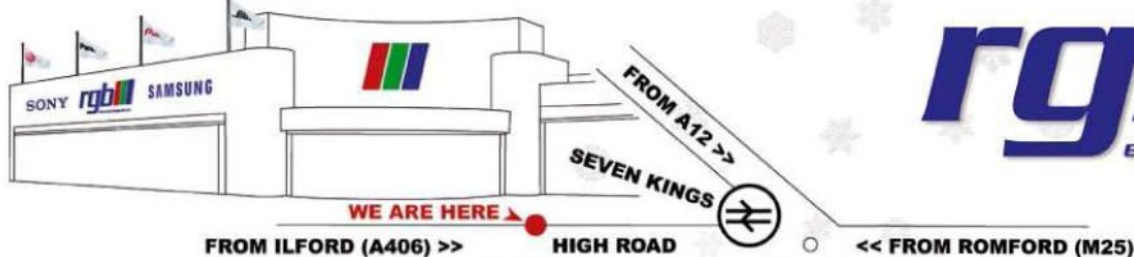
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<p>TOSHIBA 19DV615DB</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ 19" HD Ready DV Series LCD/DVD Combi ▶ Integrated Digital Tuner ▶ 1 X HDMI  <p>£194.00</p>	<p>SONOS SNSZP120UK1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Sonos® Zone Player ▶ Built-in wireless capability ▶ Multi-room music playback  <p>£399.00</p>	<p>Pioneer BDP120</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Blu-Ray Disc™ Player with BD-Live ▶ 36-Bit Deep Colour & Quick Start ▶ BDP320 Also Available  <p>£187.00</p>	<p>Pioneer DCSFS30</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ 2.1 channel DVD Home Cinema System with USB and Slim Front Speakers ▶ 1080p levels of detail ▶ MP3, WMA or MPEG-4 AAC (iTunes)  <p>£249.00</p>

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HOME CINEMA CHOICE MOVIE AWARDS 2009



While the past year has seen some incredible advancements in home cinema technology, it should never be forgotten that the final pieces in the ultimate set-up are the movies – on Blu-ray and DVD – themselves. Join us as we choose the very best moments, extras and software releases of the last twelve months ►



Best Picture Quality

Winner: Star Trek

When you watch a brand-new blockbuster on Blu-ray you expect great things, but, even so, the entire HCC team is amazed by the image quality delivered by Paramount's flawless hi-def rendition of the *Star Trek* reboot. While director JJ Abrams overplays the shaky-cam and lens flare effects at times, this AVC 2.40:1 encode always holds up to close inspection, revealing jaw-dropping levels of minute detail, desirable depth of field and perfect colour rendition. Equally impressive is how Paramount, unlike some other studios we could name, has resisted the temptation to tamper with things via Digital Noise Reduction, edge enhancement and boosting contrast ratios – ensuring that this spectacular Blu-ray transfer delivers a truly filmic home cinema experience.

All-region BD/R2 DVD, Paramount, HCC #177, p112

Also nominated...

Sin City

The 1.85:1 AVC encode of *Sin City* displays the rock-solid blacks, crisp whites and subtle colour washes of Robert Rodriguez's film-noir graphic novel adaptation perfectly. A simply excellent BD transfer.

All-region BD, Walt Disney Home Entertainment, HCC #170

Wall-E

'Awe-inspiring colours' and 'seductive blacks' were just two of the high points we noted when reviewing this Blu-ray's AVC 2.39:1 picture – and we've yet to find another hi-def CG animation to surpass it.

Region B BD, Walt Disney Home Entertainment, HCC #165



Best Audio Mix

Winner: Akira

'Probably the finest-sounding Blu-ray movie soundtrack ever' was our initial verdict on *Akira*'s 5.1 Dolby TrueHD mix, and we haven't changed our minds since. Bandai's US release was the first Blu-ray disc to feature 5.1 24bit/192kHz resolution audio (select the TrueHD Japanese language track) which is streets ahead of standard TrueHD/DTS-HD MA mixes, typically 24/48kHz.

Tsutomu Ohashi, the composer of the film, personally recommended a Dolby TrueHD 5.1 mix for *Akira*'s hi-def debut: 'We wanted to utilize a 24bit/192Khz audio stream to record a vast sound range – including natural sounds, noise and effects – at the highest possible frequency.' The result is sublime: the score is rounded and fresh, the aural FX are complex and jarring, and when combined with a high-end audio system you can pick out all the individual elements of the soundfield. This is what Blu-ray was made for!

All-region BD, Bandai, HCC #170

Also nominated...

Terminator Salvation

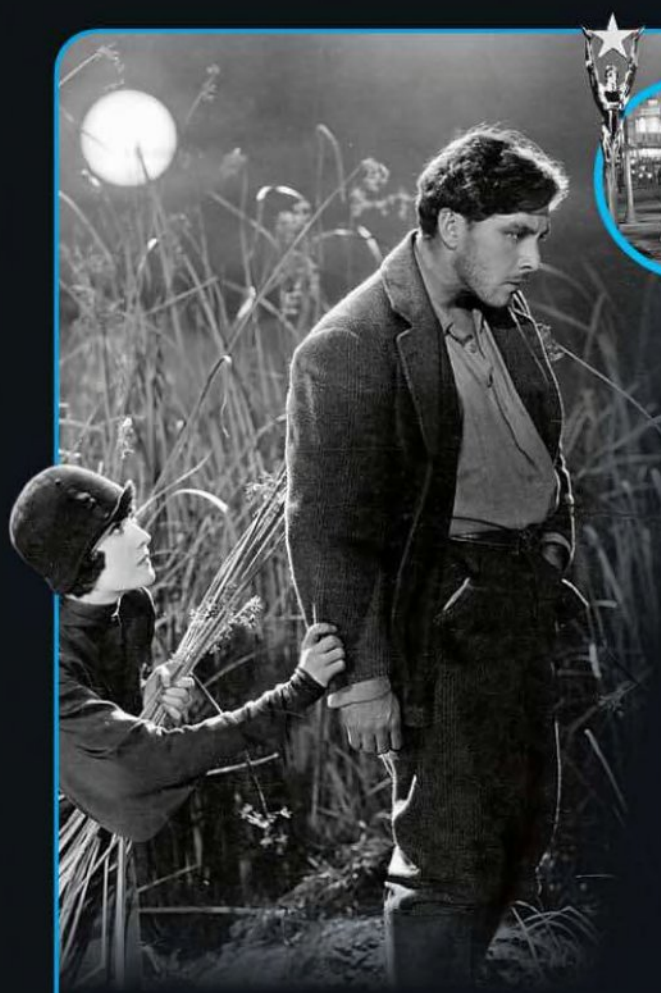
Expansive and finely textured, T4's room-shaking DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack is a dynamic aural experience that'll leave you battered and bruised.

All-region BD, 20th Century Fox, HCC #177, p113

Crank 2: High Voltage

This 7.1 DTS-HD MA mix is an inspired maelstrom of mashed up metal music, weapons fire and miscellaneous directional FX. Deserves to be played LOUD.

All-region BD, Lionsgate, HCC #174



Best Remastering

Winner: Sunrise

There's no shortage of contenders for this award, but nothing impressed us quite as much as the Blu-ray release of *Sunrise* that arrived as part of Eureka's Masters of Cinema series.

Utilising new high-definition telecines of the both the 2003 Movietone restoration and an alternate Czech version, the results are incredible for a film made more than 80 years ago in black-and-white – the transfer is pin-sharp, detailed and packed with contrast. Yes, there's still print damage, but as Eureka explains in the accompanying booklet, it decided against implementing any form of digital restoration or grain removal: 'The level of damage still present is exactly what you would see if you were to project the same 35mm film restoration theatrically'. If only every movie was treated with this same level of care and attention.

All-region BD, Eureka, HCC #177, p117

Also nominated...

The Prisoner: The Complete Series

Network's astonishing 35mm restoration makes Patrick McGoochan's battle against mindless conformity look more vibrant than ever before.

Region BD/R2 DVD, Network, HCC #176

The Red Shoes

Powell and Pressburger's masterpiece is reborn on Blu-ray via a new \$500,000 4K digital clean up that brings visual majesty back to this 1948 British drama.

Region B BD, ITV DVD, HCC #173



Best DVD Exclusive

Winner: Doctor Who: Dalek War

2 Entertain, in conjunction with The Doctor Who Restoration Team, has been doing spectacular work on bringing classic Who stories to DVD for a decade now.

This recent four-disc release continues that tradition with the usual excellent AV quality and copious extras. However, the restoration takes things even further, using cutting-edge tech to recover the original colour information from the surviving black-and-white 16mm recording of one episode and restore it to its original full-colour glory.

R2 DVD, 2 Entertain Video, HCC online

Also nominated...

Stone: 2-Disc Special Edition

Sandy Harbutt's 1970s biker movie gets a deluxe treatment nobody expected. Severin Films' lavish two-disc set is jam-packed with extras. Region 0 DVD, Severin Films, HCC #170

Not Quite Hollywood

An excellent 2008 documentary about the neglected world of Australian exploitation cinema, ably supported by worthwhile bonus features.

R2 DVD, Optimum Home Entertainment, HCC online

Best World Cinema Disc

Winner: *The Good, the Bad, the Weird*



The past year saw several Asian filmmakers dabbling with their own versions of the Hollywood Western, but best of the bunch is this wacky Korean offering from Kim Jee-won. It mixes high-octane action with big laughs and scintillating cinematography.

Unlike so many Far Eastern films that hit BD, this UK release is a real AV sensation – gorgeous AVC 2.40:1 imagery partnered with a potent DTS-HD MA 5.1 surround mix and generous extras.

Region B BD, Icon Home Entertainment, HCC #171

Also nominated...

Last Year in Marienbad

The crown jewel in the first wave of Optimum's Studio Canal Collection, this French New Wave classic boasts a sublime b&w hi-def encode and scholarly extras.

All-region BD, Optimum Home Entertainment, HCC online

Sukiyaki Western Django

This DVD release of Takashi Miike's madcap spaghetti Western comes out all guns blazing with rich, colour-saturated anamorphic visuals and dynamic DD/DTS 5.1 sonics.

R2 DVD, Contender Entertainment, HCC #176

Best TV release

Missed it on the box? Don't worry...

Winner: *Battlestar Galactica: The Complete Series* → Universal

The best sci-fi series in decades gets the Blu-ray debut it deserves – a 20-disc set loaded with extended episodes, commentaries and other top-notch extras.

The Prisoner: The Complete Series → Network

This cult '60s TV series blows us away with its incredible remastered 1080p imagery – and a host of bonus features that puts many movie releases to shame.

Doctor Who: The War Games → 2Entertain

A landmark slice of 'Classic Who' on a magnificent three-disc set packed with informative extras, and touting a beautifully restored monochrome transfer.





Best Supplementary Feature

Winner: Maximum Movie Mode

It took a while, but this year finally saw studios coming to terms with Blu-ray's interactive potential. Leading the pack by some distance is the Maximum Movie Mode used on Warner's US *Watchmen: Director's Cut* and Sony's UK *Terminator Salvation* discs.

An evolution of the trusty audio commentary, this new viewing experience drops out of the movie at key points to allow the filmmakers to discuss specific sequences in real-time, with the aid of multiple video streams. On top of this, it also provides links to additional behind-the-scenes content and image galleries related to what you are watching at the time. No mere gimmick, Maximum Movie Mode is the ultimate distillation of the kind of behind-the-scenes DVD extras that have been delighting film-fans for over a decade.

Warner Home Video/Sony Pictures, HCC #173/#177, p113

Also nominated...

Beware the Moon

Journalist/filmmaker Paul Davis put his love of *An American Werewolf in London* to great use by crafting this detailed retrospective documentary about the 1980s horror classic. All-region BD, Universal Pictures, HCC #174

The Human Factor: Exacting Revenge of the Fallen

The second *Transformers* flick was a dud, but this 135-minute doc from noted DVD producer Charles De Lauzarka is a fascinating look at every aspect of mega-budget movie making. All-region BD, Paramount, HCC #176

Best BD-Live application

Our favourite releases this year that had a little extra depth...

Winner: MovieIQ → Sony Pictures

Powered by the Gracenote video database, this neat feature allows you to access filmographies, location details and film score info while spinning your Blu-ray.

Live Lookup → Fox Home Entertainment

Similar to Sony's MovieIQ feature (if not quite so comprehensive), Fox's BD-Live technology lets users access the IMDb pages for actors/directors.

Community Screenings → Various

These one-off BD-Live events allow you to participate in a live community screening of a movie and listen to exclusive Q&As with filmmakers.



Best Animation Disc

Winner: Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs: Diamond Edition

Disney's tireless work pays off for the Blu-ray debut of this landmark 'toon. The 71-year old film truly looks as good as new thanks to the exhaustive restoration, and the two discs are overflowing with superb supplementary features – the highlight being a dizzying, interactive tour of the Hyperion Studios, featuring interviews, featurettes, art galleries and archival shorts – including the legendary *Steamboat Willie*. Region B BD, Walt Disney Home Entertainment, HCC #177, p115

Also nominated...

WALL-E: 2-Disc Set

Loaded with extras and packing one of the best-looking hi-def transfers you'll ever witness, this epic Pixar adventure has quickly become a BD poster boy. Region B BD, Walt Disney Home Entertainment, HCC #165

Star Wars: The Clone Wars – The Complete Season One

Is this the best-looking TV 'toon ever? Quite possibly, with sensational 1080p 2.35:1 VC-1 encodes of all 22 episodes gracing this epic three-disc set. Roll on the live action movies! All-region BD, Warner Home Video, HCC #176





Fight of the Year

Winner: *Drag Me to Hell*

Take one indignant gypsy hag and the young bank clerk responsible for her eviction. Throw them together inside a car with a box full of office supplies and what do you get? The funniest and most unexpected catfight in recent cinema history. Gasp as the old lady has staples fired into her head! Cringe as the toothless crone slobbers on the young girl's chin! Cheer as director Sam Raimi reminds you that he's still one of the most exciting filmmakers in the business!

Region B BD, Lionsgate, HCC #175

Also nominated...

Crank 2: High Voltage

When Chev Chelios (Jason Statham) and his gangster nemesis go at it hammer and tongs amidst the pylons of an electricity plant, they do it Godzilla-style, complete with rubber body suits and cowering stick men. Why? Does it matter?

Region B BD, Lionsgate, HCC #174

Watchmen: Director's Cut

On their way to rescue crime-fighting colleague Rorschach, Night Owl II and Silk Spectre get caught up in a prison riot. Doing what they do best, the dynamic duo break limbs and bust faces – all in director Zack Snyder's trademark slow-mo.

All-region BD, Warner Home Video, HCC #173

Funniest Film of the Year...

When you fancy a laugh, check out...

Winner: The Hangover → Warner

This smash hit about three groomsman searching for their about-to-be-wed buddy after a wild stag night packs in so many laughs it hurts.

Crank 2: High Voltage → Lionsgate

The bonkers sequel delivers electrifying action and huge laughs in equal measure. Completely offensive, but also hysterical.

Role Models → Universal

A heady mix of naked ladies, live-action role-playing and Kiss – this 'bro-mance' perfects the art of low-brow comedy.



Kill of the Year

Winner: *The Midnight Meat Train: Extreme Edition*

It's a safe bet that whenever you see Ted Raimi pop up for a cameo in a horror film, a gruesome death won't be far behind. So, welcome aboard the *Midnight Meat Train*, where Raimi feels the full force of serial killer Vinnie Jones' metal hammer on the back of his noggin, causing his eyeballs to pop out of their sockets in glorious, blood-drenched slow-motion. Bravo!

Region B BD, Lionsgate, HCC #167

Also nominated...

Friday the 13th: Killer Cut

Jason Voorhees loves a good campfire cook-off, especially when it involves stringing up a young lady in a sleeping bag and roasting her alive. Good to see *Friday the 13th* branching out a bit after 12 movies.

All-region BD, New Line, HCC #172

Death Race: Extended Version

After surviving a high-speed car crash, Grimm stands proud and gloats, 'You can burn me, you can shoot me, but you just can't kill me.' Then he gets run over...

All-region BD, Universal Pictures, HCC #166





Best Packaging

Winner: *Dawn of the Dead*

Arrow Films has breathed fresh life into George A. Romero's brilliant zombie sequel with a set that is pure collector's heaven. Bundled alongside three discs of gory goodies are a double-sided poster and 16-page booklet, all wrapped up in a clever windowed package that lets you switch the cover art depending on your mood. All-region BD/RO DVD, Arrow Films, HCC #176



Also nominated...

20th Century Boys

Fans of this live-action manga adaptation can pick up a DVD release packaged in a replica of the film's *Book of Prophecies*. Okay, this one doesn't foretell the future, but is chock-full of production notes, interviews, poster art and a handy character guide. R2 DVD, 4Digital Asia, HCC #170

Battlestar Galactica: The Complete Series

Forget the chunky US boxset, Universal Playback treated *BSG*'s UK fans to a sleek and stylish tin that instantly shot to the top of every Cylon's Christmas wish list. It's even being imported by die-hard *Battlestar* fans across the pond. All-region BD, Universal Playback, HCC #173

Best use of 3D

Our favourite releases this year that had a little extra depth...

Winner: *My Bloody Valentine 3D* → Lionsgate

Proving that 3D isn't just for 'toons, this schlocky horror throwback uses the technology to ramp up the scares, thrills and, erm, nudity.

The Polar Express Presented in 3D → Warner

The extra dimension restores some magic to this Yuletide tale, which can seem soulless in standard 2D mode. Good call, Warner!



Coraline → Universal

Universal's BD disc shipped with four pairs of anaglyph specs, meaning the whole family could revel in Henry Selick's visually arresting fantasy.



Best SFX

Winner: *Knowing*

This Nic Cage sci-fi thriller split opinion right down the middle in the HCC offices. However, the one thing we all agreed on was the quality of the plane crash scene in the film's second act – easily the most thrilling effects showcase you'll see all year. Playing out as an almost three-minute continual shot, this epic sequence boasts the very best in all aspects of SFX, from CGI to on-set trickery and pyrotechnics. It's an utterly convincing disaster scene that you simply have to see, and well worth the two days it took to set up the shoot. Region B BD, E1 Entertainment, HCC #173

Also nominated...

Star Trek

The opening scene of JJ Abrams' reboot – with the *USS Kelvin* squaring up to a massive Romulan mining ship – is a real space battle spectacular, all thanks to the geeks at ILM. All-Region BD, Paramount, HCC #177, p112

Terminator Salvation

Hats off again to the talented folks at ILM who made a digital Arnold Schwarzenegger Terminator, and seamlessly integrated it into a brawl with actor Christian Bale. All-Region BD, Sony Pictures, HCC #177, p113





Best Demo Sequence

Winner: *Quantum of Solace* – THAT car chase (01:01 - 03:35)

Chosen as the *de facto* demo sequence by audio and video specialists alike, the car chase at the beginning of *Quantum of Solace* provides everything a self-respecting home cinema fan could want. The bass response delivers like a full-blown kick in the happy sacks, while the top-end of the audio mix is clean and well-spaced enough to have you looking around for prospective gun-wielding maniacs. Images are also as sharp as Daniel Craig's craggy features, making the most of the 1080p24 resolution with plumes of finely realised dirt. In short, this sequence will take your breath away. The rest of the film's not bad either. Region B Blu-ray, 20th Century Fox/MGM, HCC #167

Also nominated...

Terminator Salvation – Robot rampage! (37:34-44:08)

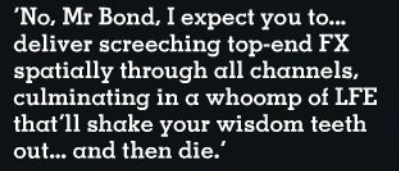
Thunderous bass, dynamic audio pans and a detailed 1080p AVC encode join forces to unleash this jaw-dropping action set-piece.

All-Region Blu-ray, Sony Pictures, HCC #177, p113

X2 – White House attack (02:50-05:18)

While it sparkles in HD, it's the audio placement and creative use of the soundstage during this sequence that makes it a truly superhuman Blu-ray demo sequence.

All-Region Blu-ray, 20th Century Fox, HCC #169



'No, Mr Bond. I expect you to... deliver screeching top-end FX spatially through all channels, culminating in a whoomp of LFE that'll shake your wisdom teeth out... and then die.'



The excellent encode's plumes of fine dust certainly give your player and HD flatpanel a decent workout. They also lend new meaning to the phrase 'gritty action thriller'





Icon of the Year

Winner: Jason Statham

Thanks to a triumphant trio of popcorn flicks – *Death Race*, *Transporter 3* and *Crank 2: High Voltage* – it's been hard to ignore the work of Britain's rising action star over the last year. The great thing about Jason Statham is that he knows what his audience likes and consistently delivers, so if you see his name on a disc sleeve, just stick the movie in your deck, fire up your system and prepare for the ride.

Movie Quotes of the Year...

No winner, just some of our faves...

'Are you one of the gay?'

Transporter 3 gets right to the heart of Jason Statham's sexuality

'I will find you and I will kill you'

Liam Neeson doesn't beat around the bush in Luc Besson's *Taken*

'We got a whole bunch of fight coming our way!'

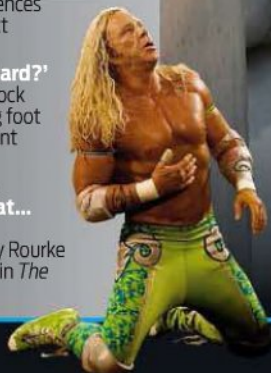
Josh Duhamel's army Major lets *Transformers 2* audiences know what to expect

'Who was that pointy-eared bastard?'

Captain Kirk and Spock get off on the wrong foot in JJ Abrams' excellent *Star Trek* reboot

'I'm an old broken down piece of meat... and I'm alone'

To be honest, Mickey Rourke almost made us cry in *The Wrestler*... Almost



Also nominated...

Hugh Jackman

Jackman's underrated double whammy of *XMO: Wolverine* and *Australia* are proof that not all Hollywood A-listers take themselves too seriously.

Megan Fox

She's only featured once in HCC in the last year (for *Transformers 2*), but such is the popularity of Fox it feels like she's in every issue.



EUREKA!

Label of the Year

Winner: The Masters of Cinema Series (Eureka Entertainment)

'In a Blu-ray marketplace overflowing with mainstream tat, we aim to offer a nourishing alternative.' That's the bullish mission statement of Eureka Entertainment and its Masters of Cinema Series, and it's definitely lived up to these claims thanks to a rich mix of titles (*Sunrise*, *Mad Detective*, *Tokyo Sonata*, *For All Mankind* and *Soul*

Power), and the incredible care and attention put into sourcing the very best HD masters and bonus features for each release. With the likes of Jean-Luc Godard's *Une Femme Mariée*, FW Murnau's *City Girl* and Fritz Lang's *M* on the slate for the start of 2010, The Masters of Cinema Series should continue to go from strength-to-strength.



Also nominated...

Studio Canal Collection (Optimum Home Entertainment)

Optimum's history with BD has been rather hit and miss, but the arrival of this new line – which serves up the best of world cinema with gorgeous new transfers and informative extras – has shown what the company is capable of.

Walt Disney Platinum/ Diamond Editions (Walt Disney Home Entertainment)

The Platinum Edition DVD range moved to Blu-ray at the end of 2008 and was an instant hit. The fact that this has just been surpassed by the Diamond Edition line (with *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*) is yet another feather in Mickey's cap.

From contemporary Asian cinema to silent 1920s classics, Eureka's Masters of Cinema Series is a cinephile's dream come true

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Disc of Year

Winner: Star Trek: 3-Disc Digital Copy Special Edition

This sci-fi adventure was probably the best of the year's blockbuster movies, and given the sensational treatment it has been afforded on Blu-ray by Paramount, it is a shoe-in for our Disc of the Year Award.

As the film's director JJ Abrams says: 'The behind-the-scenes features on the DVD – and especially the Blu-ray – give a wonderful look at the crazy, hard work and incredible fun that went into making this movie... And for people who

didn't catch *Star Trek* in the theatre, I hope they do now, as Paramount has done an exceptional job with this release; the picture and sound quality are both excellent.'

Who are we to disagree? From the award-winning 1080p image quality to the robust Dolby TrueHD 5.1 soundtrack and comprehensive collection of hi-def bonus features, there's not a single disappointment to be found – making this the Blu-ray release to beat them all.

All-region BD/R2 DVD, Paramount, HCC #177, p112



Also nominated...

Fight Club: 10th Anniversary Edition

David Fincher's provocative bout of bigscreen biffery makes a compelling Blu-ray package. It looks and sounds sensational, and has wicked little touches, like the fake *Never Been Kissed* menu and the nifty *Insomniac* Mode search index.

All-region BD, 20th Century Fox, HCC #176

Gone with the Wind: 70th Anniversary 2-Disc Collector's Edition

The Hollywood classic has transformed into a Blu-ray epic thanks to this comprehensive two-disc release. Warner's 8K digital restoration is exquisite, and the mammoth collection of extras is enough to satiate even the most rabid fan.

All-region BD, Warner, HCC #176

Disc Fail of The Year...

Let the Right One In

Momentum/Magnolia

Why has it been so hard to get a definitive Blu-ray edition of this intriguing vampire film? The US disc delivers stonking lossless audio but is saddled with dumbed-down subtitles and minimal extras. On the other hand, the UK release gets the subtitles and extras right, but opts for disappointing lossy audio. We wish the two distributors (Momentum and Magnolia) could get together and sort it out...





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Seaside style

There's more to this designer
clifftop pad than meets the eye.
Find out why on p40

Niko lights up smarthome tech

And the European company aims to undercut US brands

Belgian smarthome leader Niko recently wowed Team HCC with an impressive demonstration of integrated home automation and lighting technologies. While sophisticated illumination and integrated blind/curtain/whatever control have long been seen as the preserve of hyper-expensive American brands, the family-run Niko group is determined to popularise similar functionality at more affordable prices – without compromising quality or commitment.

'Because we make and control all aspects of the Niko system here in Sint Niklaas, we can guarantee that our users will be able to update and expand their systems without any fear of obsolescence,' promised MD Peter Watteuw. 'This means that a Niko system installed years ago can be easily updated with new modules; even faceplates for lighting switches can be swapped for new style finishes when a room is redecorated.'

The company, which has recently set up a UK base, has made a number of cool additions to its range, but catching our eye was an easy-to-install LED lighting system.

Unlike rival LED light strips, the Niko system employs a simple connector system that allows any number of strips to be linked together to make continuous LED runs of almost any length.

At its heart is a patented clip to join the different lengths. An asymmetric design ensures that the strips can only be mounted one way, making installation straightforward and easy. The LED lights can be used to add accent colours to furniture, coving or stairwells, and link through to the main Nikobus control board.

'Users can choose either full RGB LED strips or pure white,' explains Stephen Calder, of Niko UK. 'They are incredibly easy to install and show just how versatile the Niko system is.'



Niko manufactures its products at its Belgian HQ, including its LED light strips (below)

The company has also introduced a new range of low-voltage transformers for LED downlighters in anticipation of the phasing out of 230V halogen lamps. The company maintains that a 12V spotlight connected to a Niko transformer will produce a brighter light yet consume less energy than rival kit.



Fully-fledged install

Of course, it's the integration of sound and vision with lighting and control that most interests the HCC geek squad, and a tour of a fully-fledged house installation revealed just how slick control-tech is becoming. Using a Pronto (Niko doesn't supply its own remote handsets, choosing instead to make Pronto control codes available for free download), a single key press powered up the living room screen, amp and source while dimming the lights and dropping exterior shutters. The only thing left to do was pop corn and relax...

OmniMount goes green



Responding to the wishes of eco-conscious consumers, OmniMount has released a new line

of environmentally responsible TV wall-mounts.

Dubbed the OmniLite Series, the range has launched with two slim-profile mounts – the £80 OL125FT (25-45in screens) and £90 OL200FT (42-70in screens), which the company claims have been specifically engineered to reduce the amount of overall material by 32 per cent, whilst also increasing the mount's overall strength by an impressive 65 per cent.

Always use protection



Mains-supplied power can be subject to a lot of electrical interference and noise, all of which has

an adverse effect on the picture quality of your cinema system. This is where UK-based power conditioning and distribution tech manufacturer ISOL-8 comes into the picture.

Priced at around £190, ISOL-8's compact VMC1080 is designed to protect against damaging voltage spikes and filter frequencies that affect video signals (both SD and HD), and filter noise that the display's power supply generates.

Motion mogul



Swedish company Lava Electronics AB believes it can revolutionise the way people enjoy TVs

in their homes thanks to its latest remote-controlled wall-brackets, which allow a TV to turn towards its audience through an arc of up to 180 degrees.

Distributed in the UK by Armour Home, the mMotion range currently consists of two models, the LA 1005 (for 25-37in screens) and LA 1010 (up to 50in screens), priced around £180, and come supplied with a remote control with configurable presets. Both are 'universal' fitting and will accommodate all brands.

Imerge evolves



Imerge has launched a series of enhancements for its MediaServer MSI and XIVASafe hard disk

storage system. Available for download to existing MSI users, the update aims to boost functionality through the implementation of an iPhone/iPod Touch control interface; 'Digital Safe' data backup to the XIVASafe; a detailed parental control facility (which is delivered per-zone, so, for example, the main cinema can be kept free of restrictions, while media access in a child's bedroom is limited); and advanced metadata editing of track details, movie credits, synopsis, etc.

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Seaside style

Anton van Beek
discovers a smarthome
that combines tasteful
minimalism with AV luxury

Crestron control is key to
this multiroom installation,
hence the wireless
touchpanel in the living room





Kit Checklist

Middle Atlantic: 2x racks & shelving/
cable management/ventilation
Crestron: CP2e control processor;
AAE audio distribution system
Maven: Gigabit Network Kit
Onkyo: TX-SR706 AV receiver
Pioneer: BDP-LX71 Blu-ray player
Sky+HD: Set-top box
Apple TV: 160GB multimedia box
Apple: Mac Mini computer
Kramer: FC-48 DVI/HDMI converter;
VS-42HDMI 4:2 HDMI switcher
Apple: iPod docking station
Crestron: 3x CLS-C6 iLux lighting
controller; DIN-AP2 Din Rail lighting
processor; DIN-4DIMLV4 Din Rail
fluorescent lighting dimmer;
custom lighting circuit patch panel
Living Room:
Loewe: Individual 40 Compose LCD
TV; stand with centre channel
SpeakerCraft: 4x AIM7 2-ceiling spkr
Artcoustic: Sub & PA260 power amp
Apple: iPod Touch 32GB
Kitchen:
SpeakerCraft: 2x AIM7 2-ceiling spkr
Apple: iPhone 3GS; Custom in-wall
iPod docking station
Crestron: C2NI-CB AV keypad
Dining Room:
SpeakerCraft: 2x AIM7 2-ceiling spkr
Master Bedroom:
Samsung: 32in Full HD LCD
SpeakerCraft: 2x AIM7 2-ceiling spkr
Apple: iPod Touch 32GB
Crestron: 2x C2NI-CB AV keypad
Master En-suite:
SpeakerCraft: 2x AIM7 2-ceiling spkr
Crestron: CH-MD1 motion detector
Guest Bedroom:
SpeakerCraft: 2x AIM7 2-ceiling spkr
Crestron: C2NI-CB Kit lighting/AV
keypad
Guest Bathroom:
SpeakerCraft: 2x AIM7 2-pivoting
ceiling speaker
Crestron: 2x CH-MD1 in-ceiling
motion detector
Hot tub balcony:
SpeakerCraft: 2x Outdoor Element
speakers
Hallway/Front entrance:
Crestron: C2NI-CB Kit lighting/AV
keypad; Door entry intercom
system

If you're looking for the ultimate example of smarthome technology in action, then you don't need to look any further than this swanky cliff-top property on the south coast of England.

A quick glance at the photographs on these pages will tell you most of what you need to know about the spectacular new-build property, which not surprisingly, is owned and designed by an architect.

And I'd like to thank...

The multiroom audio and home automation technology was implemented by Dorset-based install specialist Maven AV Ltd, and sets this seaside property apart.

If stylistically understated, it's still one of the more sophisticated properties featured in *HCC* over the years. It's the work behind the scenes, poking out from above the whitewashed surfaces like a technological iceberg, which makes it really special.

Employed early on in the design process, the team from Maven worked closely with the architect/owner to realise his ideas for high-definition video and discrete audio distribution, as well as automated lighting and control throughout the house.

What's more, the system needed to be able to take control of third-party products such as security and heating control, which would be added at a later date.

As the owner was already well aware of what could be done by Crestron, he was keen to use one of its systems. But he did have some very specific requirements for the Maven team. This included using any one of the keypads placed around

From the balcony, you can switch on the hot tub with one of the widely available iPods!



42 INSTALL

the property to control not just the AV and lighting systems, but also the blinds. You can even use them to open the front door when you're feeling lazy.

Another key factor for controlling the interfaces was the capability to use an iPod Touch and iPhone in addition to Crestron's own roaming TPMC-8X wireless touchpanel.

Utilising an Apple docking station in the kit racks or the custom-built in-wall dock in the kitchen, the iPod not only works as a digital source for the system, but (thanks to a recent Crestron app) can now also be used for room selection, AV source-control and house-wide lighting tweaking.

The install team went one step further by offering two-way feedback control of the automated skylight through the iPod, just in case the rain-detection unit doesn't close it in time. That said, the wireless Crestron controller still has plenty of plus points of its own, including the ability to turn on the balcony-based hot-tub.

Room to grow

While fitting in with the same minimalist aesthetics that make up the rest of the house, the AV system is still potent. The two Middle Atlantic Racks in the living room play host to a variety of sources (on top of the aforementioned iPod dock) including a Pioneer Blu-ray player, Sky+ HD, AppleTV, and an Apple Mac Mini. Maven also sited in-ceiling SpeakerCraft speakers in every room.

While some *HCC* readers might question the decision to go for nothing larger than a 40in TV in the living room, stylistically, the Loewe screen is a perfect match to the clean lines of this beach-hut-styled apartment – and Maven also installed cabling that will allow the addition of an in-ceiling projector and cinema screen at a later date, as well as pre-cabling that will allow the addition of Full HD screens in both guest bedrooms.

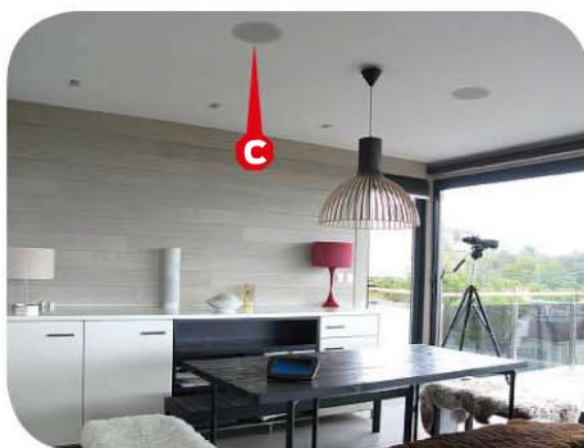
The end result is a visually stunning and forward-thinking smarthome that offers plenty of options for further tech upgrades. No wonder it picked up the prize for 'Ultimate Connected Home – Below £250,000' at the 2009 Crestron Integration Awards: 'A fantastic project which proves [Mavens] hard work, dedication and innovation in driving our industry forward', said the judges.

We're not going to argue with that ●



A

B



C

A Pioneering scenes

A high-end BDP-LX71 Blu-ray player from Pioneer was chosen to for HD movie duties

B Machines in control

If one manufacturer represents the brains running this installation, it's got to be Crestron. The company's CP2e control processor supplies the little grey cells

C Da Vinci effect

In-ceiling speakers with pivoting tweeters are spread throughout the property, giving a Mona Lisa-style aural effect – the music follows you everywhere

D More Apples than pears

Apple follows hot on the heels of Crestron for the prize of most influential kit supplier. As well as Apple TV and a Mac mini, iPods are used as both a source and a control interface

E Screen 2

Considering the vast array of kit on display, the number and size of screens seems almost modest. There's a 40in Loewe LCD on view in the living room, while the master bedroom pictured here makes do with a 32in Full HD Samsung LCD



D



E



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Anton van Beek visits a family living room with a secret

Not everyone is in a position to devote an entire room of their house to a dedicated cinema – sometimes, it needs to be fitted in around other requirements. This was the challenge for the AV experts at Finite Solutions when designing this install. At first glance, it looks like nothing more than a (quite stylish) living room that can be used by the whole family, but pick up the Philips Pronto remote and you can enjoy a whole wealth of technology that lies beneath the surface.

Press one button on the controller, and two of the bespoke suede panels in the feature wall move backwards and raise up. A 40in Loewe Compose LCD screen then slides out to sit flush with the surrounds. Push the button a second time and a seven-foot projector screen drops down from a letterbox slot in the ceiling, while a Future Automation projector lift whirrs into life at the back of the room, bringing an Infocus IN76 (and a real home cinema feel) into play.

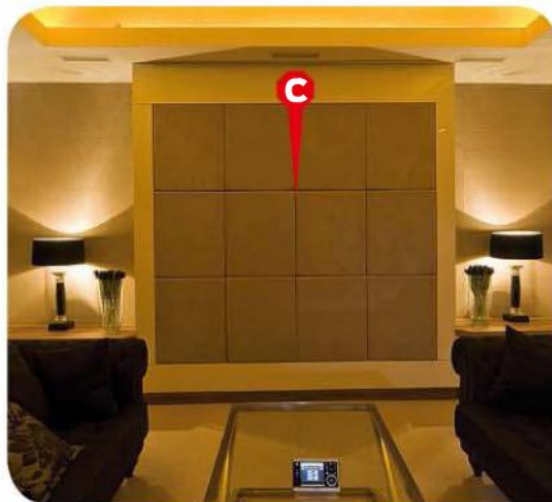
A light touch

To add some movie-watching atmosphere, Finite Solutions fitted a Rako lighting system that automatically dims the lamps and switches on a subtle, ceiling-mounted LED rope light. At the same time, the curtains automatically close, thanks to a silent Gliss rail.

Surround sound is handled by five KEF in-ceiling speakers. Discreet when not in use, these kick into life during the room's transition, dropping out of the ceiling to direct the audio towards the seating positions.

Of course, switch the system off and everything automatically returns to its original state.

A winner of a CEDIA award in 2009, this room certainly illustrates how automation tech can help us achieve our home cinema dreams – and without turning the living room into a mess of kit and cabling.





→ Kit Checklist

InFocus: IN76 projector
An HD Ready model – maybe it's time to replace it with the brand's IN81?
Beamax: 7-foot electric projector screen
Loewe: 40in Compose LCD TV
Sony: PlayStation 3 console
iDyl: Multiroom media server
Future Automation: PD2 projector lift
Future Automation: SPS800 moving panel mechanism
Arcam: AVR100 receiver
Arcam: P1000 power amplifier
Sky: Sky+HD set-top box
KEF: 3x Ci3-80QT in-ceiling speakers (front)
KEF: 2x Ci200.3QT in-ceiling speakers (rear)
Bowers & Wilkins: ASW600 subwoofer
Pronto: TSU9600 remote control
Pronto: RFX9600 serial extender
Rako: Lighting system



Room essentials

A Front soundstage

The trio of motorised KEF Ci3-80QT in-ceiling speakers pack a 3in version of the brand's Uni-Q array flanked by long-throw bass drivers

B Safety first

The Pronto controller doesn't just run the cinema – CCTV footage can be routed directly to its display

C Motion pictures

Future Automation's SPS800 sliding mechanism allows the TV to be hidden from view when not in use

D Seat of power

The power amp, an Arcam P1000, delivers 135W per channel to the KEF system. It sits in the kit cupboard alongside a Sony PlayStation 3 and Sky+HD for hi-def, and an iDyl media server

Certified: AV-holic!

Every issue, one **HCC reader** invites you to take a tour of their beloved home cinema setup...



Not for me, thanks:
Meet another AV-holic with no plans for a 3D makeover

Introduce yourself...

Michael Evans, 45 years young.

Are you an AV-holic?

Definitely! My setup appeared in *HCC* back in May 2007. A lot's changed since then. The Yamaha DSP-A1 has been replaced by an Onkyo TX-SR805. Along with that had to come a Yamaha external RF demodulator so I could still have my AC3 uncompressed audio from my LaserDiscs. I've also stepped up to Sky+HD and added Blu-ray.

Have the upgrades made a difference?

Yes. A massive difference – three pure HD feeds now, not just upscaled ones. And the Onkyo AVR is stunning with the hi-def audio, especially with the extra rear speakers to make a 7.2 setup. It's a shame there's not more 7-channel DTS-HD movies out there. I think I have all the ones there are.

What's your newest buy?

A Panasonic DMP-BD55, modified fully to all regions, so

my Chinese version with English audio of *The Cave* was worth the hunt on the internet.

And what's next?

Nothing planned at the moment, but my mind changes daily. I'm working on my remote at the mo, adding all my Sky HD channels – with picture icons – to my Philips Pronto RU970.

How much have you spent on your hobby over the years?

Last time I was in the mag it was £12,300, not including movies. I haven't been counting since then. It's better not to...

What's your current fave disc?

Any of my 7.1 audio movies, as the extra speakers make viewing that much better.

Are you excited about 3D?

No. It would be a big layout for me to change the screen and player. Then the studios would most certainly let you down with the software to watch – just look at the way most BDs only carry 5.1 audio! Anyway, *My Bloody Valentine* in 3D, with the cardboard glasses, is pants! ●

Room essentials

A Old faithful

Michael considered replacing his 50in Pioneer Kuro with a 60in version, but has stuck with the original screen: 'This one cost me a lot of money and it's a stunning picture.'

B Two's company

The presence of two Bowers & Wilkins subwoofers means this cinema room is never lacking in the low-frequency arena

C New arrival

With the HD format war over, our AV-holic added Blu-ray to his system. First with a Sony BDP-S300, and then this multiregion Panasonic DMP-BD55...

D Legacy software

...But that doesn't mean the collection of HD DVDs – or LaserDiscs – is going to end up in the bin

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HCC Ratings key

Outstanding	1 2 3 4 5
Above average	1 2 3 4 5
Acceptable	1 2 3 4 5
Disappointing	1 2 3 4 5
Dire	1 2 3 4 5

HCC DOESN'T BELIEVE IN OVER-PRISING HARDWARE. CONSEQUENTLY, A THREE-STAR RATING SHOULDN'T BE CONSIDERED A BAD RESULT, IT SIMPLY MEANS THAT A PRODUCT PERFORMS ACCORDING TO ITS CATEGORY POSITION. A FIVE-STAR RATING IS ONLY AWARDED IN EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Deadly duo



Arcam's pre-power amplifier combo leaves **Richard Stevenson** battered, bruised and grinning from ear-to-ear

If you sat on the sumptuous leather sofa of power at Arcam HQ, what would you do to top the success of the AVR600 receiver? It had all the major features required, consciously left out a lot of the trinkets and tinsel, and concentrated on sound quality. It is a true multipurpose hi-fi stereo and AV amplifier. Clearly, the answer was to punt up and down the Cam all Summer with a jugful of Pimms, and set about further improving premium-quality, style-tastic high-end audio.

The result is the FMJ AV888 processor pre-amp and the monster FMJ P777 multichannel power amplifier. A two-box beast separating the delicacies of the DSP engine and low-voltage source signals in the processor from the Frankenstein-level voltages in the power amp. Features-wise, see our review of the AVR600 (HCC #172) because they are all but identically 'lite'. What separates the manly pre-power from the boyish integrated is the attention to detail at every level. That and over 300 hours of listening tests to nail the final tuning.

The AV888 pre-amp is quite different from the likes of Denon's AVP-A1HD, and not just because the Denon outguns the Arcam on features at a ratio of about ten-to-one. The AV888 uses quasi analogue input switching and a 'direct' mode that directly couples the input board to the output stages (via the volume control) with a short, flat link cable. Its D/A converter configuration also breaks from the norm of eight discrete DACs and uses four high-end stereo devices from Wolfson, each with its own local sub-regulated supply for optimum sound quality.

The AV888's outputs can be configured as fully-balanced over XLR connections to reduce cable-borne interference – this also offers installers the option of much longer cable runs. Speaking as a big fan

→ Specifications

FMJ AV888

Dolby Digital TrueHD: YES plus Dolby Digital+, Dolby Digital EX, Dolby Pro-Logic II

DTS-HD Master Audio: YES plus DTS High Resolution Audio, DTS-ES Discrete, DTS-ES Matrix, DTS96/24, DTS Neo:6

THX: NO

Multichannel input: YES 7.1 phono

Multichannel outs: YES 7.3 phono and XLR

Multiroom: YES Zone 2 (audio and video) and Zone 3 (audio)

AV inputs: YES 5 x S-video & composite; 7 x digital audio (3 x coaxial, 4 x optical)

HDMI input/output: YES 5-in, 2-out

Video upscaling: YES to 1080p

Component: YES 5-in, 1-out

Dimensions: 435(w) x 185(h) x 415(d)mm

Weight: 12kg

Features: Audiophile quality components throughout; balance line drivers; IP control over Ethernet; Dolby Volume; video enhancements including edge enhance and NR; RC-5 remote input jacks; full duplex RS232; 12V triggers in/out; direct mode; support for Arcam Dock; complete individual set-up for each input; PC set-up via web/Ethernet; remote installer access

FMJ P777

Amplification: 7 x 150W

Unbalanced inputs: 7-channel phono with loop-through

Balanced inputs: 7-channel XLR

Triggers: 12V trigger input

Dimensions: 435(w) x 460(d) x 185(h)mm

Weight: 31.0kg

54 REVIEWS

of balanced interconnects at lengths of 5m or greater, that gets a thumbs up from me.

Other hi-fi-derived luxuries include a mechanically-dampened chassis, a data reclocking system to reduce jitter over HDMI and Arcam's Mask of Silence. No, it's not something for when the wife is nagging, but a host of technical features and shielding, implemented to ensure that **no component, signal path or cable in the design has any detrimental affect on another.**

Interestingly, the Mask of Silence extends to the radio tuner – or rather the lack of one. Not having a tuner avoids any stray RF wandering around the pristine internals of the AV888. It does, though, offer audio media streaming from a PC and access to the wonders of internet radio via the Ethernet port. This gives you access to thousands of stations globally, so it's not all bad.

The other kick-butt features include decoding for all common HD audio codecs, three-zone multiroom, and, er, erm... Well, there's Dolby Volume to reduce the audio levels on those pesky loud adverts.

No messin'

Yes, the AV888 is pretty bare-bones in terms of features. Even the interface is presented as basic text menus, rather than the fancy GUIs found on even budget AVRs these days. Nor does it succumb to badge-fest trumps either – so no THX or Audyssey legends on the fascia – although you do get a very accurate auto set-up system courtesy of Analog Devices' Auto Room Tuning code. Tweaked by Arcam, this offers 1cm speaker distance and 0.25dB adjustment increments and a single-state EQ system. As 1cm equates to a complete half-phase at 20kHz, I can see why such accuracy is so important.

The P777 power-amp is just as much a product of Arcam's hi-fi heritage – only in seven-channel guise. It's a brute, too. A pair of massive power supplies run through a soft start routine when powering up, to save taking out your house fuse, and promises over 1.6kW at full bore. You get fully-balanced XLR and unbalanced phono configuration with loop-throughs, lots of high-end audiophile components and a 12V trigger. But there is no getting away from the fact that the P777 is a damn great powerhouse. And there ain't nothing wrong with that, baby.

Another area the Arcam pre-power differs from its peers is in the ease of use. I own a Denon AVP-A1HD and its operational complexities are up there with piloting a space shuttle, blindfolded. Not so this Arcam pair. The setup is straightforward, although likely to be done by your Arcam dealer, and the day-to-day operations are largely one-button simple. This is one of the few high-end AV devices that could conceivably be used by the whole family.

Rich and weighty

Then again, your mother isn't going to like what it is capable of. The AV888 has a rich and weighty balance that just begs you to give it a handful of volume – and the P777 seriously delivers when you do. *Hellboy 2: The Golden Army* on Blu-ray is ideal fodder, and the Arcam duo turns the soundtrack into a monster of solidity and presence. This pairing's speed, scale and dynamic impact is a positive adrenaline rush compared to Arcam's traditionally 'safe'





Connections

A Analogue HD

Component inputs still have their uses, especially for older pre-HDMI hi-def kit. However, do we need five of them?

B Room for one more?

We'd have preferred a few more HDMI inputs on the AV888 just to be on the safe side – and there isn't one around the front either

C Need input

These phono inputs can be used to connect a Super Audio CD player for true audiophile multichannel music

D Decision time

Once the AV888 has worked its magic, you have two options for outputting the audio signal to the P777 – unbalanced phonos or balanced XLR outputs. If the power amp is located a long way from the pre-amp, say in a boot room, it's recommended to use the XLR connections to limit interference

E Music streamer

The Arcam's Ethernet port gives you access to internet radio, and your own network-stored audio files

F Heavy metal

If you must stack the two Arcam's on top of each other, we recommend putting the P777 on the bottom – at 31kg, it's not exactly lightweight

AV/CV

Product:
Super hi-end
pre-power
combo

Position:
Arcam's state-of-the-art
flagship
AV solution

Peers:
Denon
AVP-A1HD/
POA-A1HD;
Pioneer Susano

balance. Engage the EQ and it does the AV equivalent of knocking back five tequila slammers and a Red Bull chaser. It's ludicrously potent and a rip-roaring ride that does real justice to big-budget blockbusters.

Better still, unlike some of the larger Japanese integrated models, it isn't all about big-bang action movies, either. **The Arcam duo manages subtlety with a smooth and even hand**, managing to sound robustly high-end even at low volumes and

with more pedestrian movies. The sound is never harsh or brittle, never has you reaching for the volume to knock it back a couple of clicks, yet happily ekes out little details and subtle dialogue inflections. With any disc from *The Matrix Trilogy* on Blu-ray, Laurence Fishburne's incredibly expressive vocal tone is crafted with absolute precision. 'Do you think that is air you are breathing?' No, probably not, Morpheus – I was holding my breath with excitement.

In terms of home cinema fireworks the 777/888 combo does remain a little less frisky and a little less edgy than the range-topping Pioneer Susano (integrated) or the Denon A1HD pre-power. But this is a matter of preference (and speaker partnership) rather than qualitative finality. While the latter two amps can show the Arcam a thing or two about searing top-end detail and sheer size of soundfield, the AV888/P777 is smoother, richer and easier to listen to across a wider range of

Dedicated *adj.* devoted wholly to a special purpose



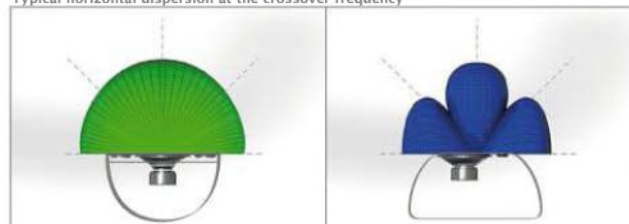
What you want above all from a 5.1 surround sound system is accuracy – and that depends on the quality of your centre speaker, which typically handles around 60% of the soundtrack content.

So why settle for a conventional satellite in this crucial role? Even worse, one plonked on its side?

You instantly notice the difference with our dedicated KHT3005SE high performance centre speaker because it's specifically designed for the job: with twin 75mm (3in.) bass drivers flanking KEF's latest Uni-Q® HF/midrange array in an acoustically inert cast aluminium enclosure, it combines superbly natural vocals with hefty frontal 'slam' for dramatic effects.

Even more importantly, it avoids all the lobing problems you get from using a vertical speaker sideways, with the sound image varying erratically from one place to the next. Instead, the unrivalled dispersion of Uni-Q allows everyone to share the same strikingly detailed 3D experience, wherever they sit. And that's true dedication for you.

Typical horizontal dispersion at the crossover frequency



Dedicated centre speaker with Uni-Q

Conventional speaker mounted horizontally



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→ Tech Labs



Size matters:
Is your rack big enough for Arcam's flagship home cinema product?

movies. If they were cars, the Arcam would be a top-spec S-Class Mercedes to the Denon's Audi R8 and the Pioneer's Nissan GT-R.

And then we get to the Arcam's trump card – music. Or rather, real hi-fi sound with music. There are very few AV amps that cut it as genuine high-end hi-fi amplifiers as well. The AV888/P777 is firmly in this exclusive club and vying for a position on the board. Leonard Cohen's *Live in London* CD is immaculately recorded and the Arcam creates every ounce of the passion and feeling of the event (and I know... I was there). Cohen's voice is reproduced with amazing depth and integrity, allowing his aging tones and subtle inflections to infuse every lyric. This is the sort of 'warts and all' accuracy only normally available from serious stereo amplifiers.

Engage more channels with music and it gets even better. I spun up *Oh My God* from the Kaiser Chief's live Elland Road concert Blu-ray and just revelled in the Arcam's scale and passionate rendition of this anthem. It had me leaping up and down on the sofa singing along with the chorus. In all my years reviewing amplifiers, this is the first Arcam I would have ever said that about. Brilliant.

A bug's life

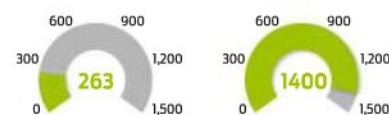
Criticisms? Yes, there are a couple, and not just the deliberate dearth

of fancy features. Our review sample had a few bugs here and there that should have been ironed out; the subwoofer thumped when I powered off the processor, every speaker thumped if I turned off the processor without turning off the power amp first, and there was occasionally a long delay in the HDMI handshaking to the display device. The AV888/P777 system also had more than its fair share of pops, clicks and ultra high-pitched sounds when I switched various features on and off. None of these happen once it is all setup and you are watching a movie, but bugs like this bug me – as you virtually never get them with the top-spec Japanese amps. Arcam, however, says all these irritations have now been fixed via a firmware update.

That aside, I couldn't help but nod appreciatively at Arcam's AV888/P777 pairing and believe that **the extensive time, effort and tuning lavished on this pair has all been worthwhile.**

Despite its high-end status, this is an all-round everyday amplifier solution that is pretty much idiot-proof and sounds absolutely great with both movies and music. The fairly frugal features-count isn't going to appeal to die-hard kit enthusiasts, but if you want top-flight AV performance without having to become an AV geek then Arcam's sumptuous pre-power combo has no equal •

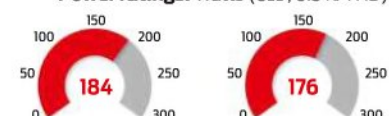
Power consumption: Watts



Idling: With enormous power comes enormous consumption, even when it's sitting in the rack idling

Powered: In five-channel mode, consumption reflects the independent module design of the power amplifier

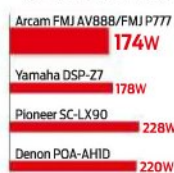
Power ratings: Watts (8Ω, 0.5% THD)



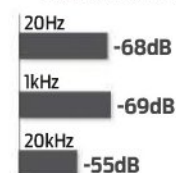
2-channel 8Ω: Stereo performance is above the claimed 150W-per-channel into 8Ω

5-channel 8Ω: Unsurprisingly, the multichannel performance parallels that of the two-channel output

Untainted: Watts



Signal/noise: dB



Fidelity firewall:

Our measure of output power before low levels of distortion (0.05% THD) kick-in. The Arcam's 174W figure is a good result

S/N tests:

Excellent results at low and high frequencies, less distinguished at the top end



HCC VERDICT

Arcam FMJ AV888/P777
£4,500/£3,500 Approx

Highs: Top-flight movie sound; genuine hi-fi music reproduction; superb build; easy to use

Lows: Light on features; bugs need splatting by firmware

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

58 SONY KDL-46Z5800 → £1,900 Approx → www.sony.co.uk

With Freesat HD, AppliCast and media streaming,
this is one of Sony's most feature-packed TVs



Freesat fuels Sony fightback

Once king of the television scene, Sony has ceded ground to its rivals in recent times. But the company is back with a bang, says **Rik Henderson**



What a TV! Sony's Freesat-enabled LCD debut is a thrilling example of how good a cutting-edge, CCFL-backlit screen can be.

On looks alone, the KDL-46Z5800 could easily be dismissed. It's thin without being really skinny, but is, from the front, just an anonymous black rectangle. There's little or no flair displayed, save for a glowing Sony logo that you'll invariably turn off anyway, else it hampers the viewing experience. It has a relatively drab aesthetic – in essence, the telly equivalent of holidaying in Burnley.

However, none of this matters when it's switched on. In fact, the blandness of the exterior helps draw the eye to the glass itself. And maybe that's the point – it's here where the magic happens, after all.

The 46Z5800 casts a colour-filled, detail-rich spell, which dazzles, excites and provides AV lobbyists

AV/CV

Product: Sony's first LCD TV with a Freesat tuner. It also features the Motionflow 200Hz engine

Position: With this much tech crammed inside, it's definitely one of the flagship sets for the brand

Peers: Panasonic TX-P46Z1; Panasonic TX-P46G10; LG 42LF7700

with enough irrefutable evidence to turn any HD-abstainee into a true believer. In picture performance terms, it is, quite simply, the best CCFL-backlit LCD TV I've clapped eyes on this year.

It's a free for all

To be completely honest, Freesat has lost a little of its shine for me since Freeview HD came into the frame (the hardware may be thin on the ground but I know a bigger rollout is now just months away). I'm a big fan of free high-definition programming, and applaud any such technology on offer, but because I live in London, I'm in the fortunate position of being able to satisfy my needs via a conventional rooftop aerial – a less bothersome route than a satellite dish, and one most can undertake even if they're in a listed building or rented property. However, not everybody lives in a Freeview HD-capable area, so Freesat remains a smart and viable option. It's also one that the Z5800 handles very admirably indeed.

The quality of images delivered via the Sony's Freesat tuner is remarkable. Often, I'll gloss over a flatscreen's TV-viewing performance because digital terrestrial pictures invariably look poor no matter what fancy processing is employed. The transmission signal is usually so broken and muddled that even the greatest panels can look like a unkempt building site.

This is where Sony's Motionflow 200Hz technology comes in. When enabled, specifically on its 'Low' setting, the processing makes both SD and HD programming appear sharp, and aids smooth movement without introducing the sort of edge artefacts often associated with rival brand's technologies. Other similar high-frame rate systems can also add a fake sheen to pictures, giving them a camcorder-style feel, but this Sony doesn't. Dare I say it, I'd be tempted to leave the processing engaged for Blu-ray movie playback, too.

The effect is less impressive with the set's in-built Freeview tuner, probably because the source's frailties are harder to gloss over, but that's a fall-back position anyway. I can't see anybody shelling out just shy of two grand on a 46in Freesat TV and not have a satellite dish to plug it into. They'd certainly be pleased they did.

That's not to say the set is faultless, though. For a start, whilst picture quality is superb, audio performance is not. The speakers are functional at best, and I found both of the available sound modes (dialogue and surround) lack any form of dynamism. I'm not entirely sure that surround does what it says on the tin, either. The soundfield on offer is clean and crisp but as flat as week-old cola.

In addition, AppliCast, Sony's current internet widget feature, is as useful as a glass jockstrap. The meagre array of RSS feeds and

→ Specifications

HD Ready: YES 1080p24
Digital TV tuner: YES DVB-T with CI slot, plus Freesat tuner
Scart: YES two
Component video: YES one set
HDMI: YES 4 x v1.3
PC input: YES one VGA
Sound: 2 x 10W speakers
Resolution: 1920 x 1080
Brightness (claimed): N/A
Contrast ratio (claimed): 100,000:1 (dynamic)
Dimensions: 1,091(w) x 672(h) x 86(d)mm

Weight (without stand): 21.9kg
Features: Motionflow 200Hz picture processing; Bravia Engine 3; Live Colour Creation; WCG-CCFL backlight; 10bit panel; DLNA connectivity (music, video, photos); AppliCast (net applications); USB media player (via USB 2.0 port); Bravia Sync; Energy saving switch; Picture frame mode



Killer picture:

The 46Z5800 delivers bold colours and fine detail rendition

applications on offer is almost insulting, especially in comparison to rival manufacturers' similar technologies (see HCC #176 for our rundown of systems on offer). There are plenty of good options when it comes to buying network-capable TVs and if that feature is high on your shopping list, you might not give this model a second chance. Sony is apparently addressing criticisms on the tech for future panels, and extra functionality may come down the pipe for this set, but buyers should take these reservations on board.

The Z5800 does, however, offer a full set of media streaming and playing abilities, via Ethernet or USB memory stick. And, unlike other Sony kit I've seen of late, this screen can handle the full family of video, audio and photo files through both delivery formats. In addition, there's a picture frame mode on the TV that can turn it into a work of art in your living room. And that's quite apt, because I'm happy to call this TV a work of art. Its picture performance alone demands such praise.

Best of both worlds

After viewing a mix of *Terminator Salvation* and *Ice Age 3* on Blu-ray, I can safely confirm that it handles dark, murky, shadow-filled or explosive, vibrant, saturated scenes with the same aplomb. The latter, animated movie is awash with stark, vivid blues and greens, and the Z5800 shows them with an intensity that no cinema screen could possibly achieve. The latest in the *Terminator* franchise, however, requires deft control over sepia tones and an

ability to pick out detail in darkness – a doddle for the display.

The HCC proprietary Test Card has been designed to expose TV's common foibles, and there are some areas where LCD technology can often struggle. Yet in this instance I noted no problems. Even reds look bold and authentic, before (in 'Standard' mode) and after calibration. Our test regime also highlights gradation issues, with some panels exhibiting light banding: the Z5800 passed with flying colours.

While the contrast levels are good, they could've been awesome with the adoption of an LED backlight (local dimming, especially).

It's also the only sticking point that I can imagine somebody having when considering this screen over other comparable 46inchers.

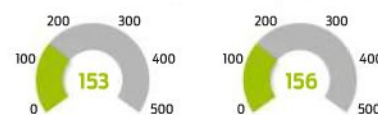
I believe that other issues, such as the audio performance, are almost irrelevant. It's hard to imagine that anybody willing to invest heavily in a flatscreen of this pedigree won't be matching it with a well-specified home cinema system, 5.1 or more. Flatscreens *per se* have rotten audio – it's a side-effect of having such a thin footprint.

CCFL fights back

So will the Z5800 struggle when placed alongside a 46in LED TV? In picture quality and features, I don't think so. However, buzzwords mean a lot in this market, and there is no more attractive moniker than LED at the moment. Therefore, this set may get overlooked. I hope not, though. It's exceptional ●

Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



White Screen:

Power consumption is 153W with a pure white 100IRE signal and the audio muted – average for a set this size. Power Saving Mode and Light Sensor cut use to 88W in dim lighting

Test footage:

There's not much increase in power consumption with movie footage and full volume. Overall a good performance

TV Contrast: ratio



Picture:

Measured contrast ratio in Dynamic mode comes close to paper claims, and luminance is high at 85.73fl. In standard mode contrast measures 6,074:1

Colour temp: Kelvin



Presets:

A small selection of CT presets, but manual R/G/B level and gain give perfect results
Neutral: 8,405K
Warm 1: 7,437K
Warm 2: 6,234K
Cool 1: 10,375K



HCC VERDICT

Sony KDL-46Z5800
£1,900 Approx

Highs: Superb picture performance; an excellent use of 200Hz technology; good multimedia prowess

Lows: Plain design; CCFL-backlight; limited net interactivity

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



DENON

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AVR-1910 High Definition AV receiver | DBP-2010 Blu-ray Player // This mighty duo offers three outstanding characteristics that will lift you up to a new dimension of home cinema: More than 50 experts of the renowned EISA Awards Jury have voted the AVR-1910 to be the best home theatre receiver 2009-2010. Its Dolby ProLogic IIz sound program supports two additional front height speakers to deliver an even more spacial surround experience. And last but not least: the DBP-2010 offers BD Profile 2.0, multiple format playback as well as leading edge 10-bit video processing to get the most even out of your old DVDs. Go and visit this show first at your local retailer or www.denon.co.uk



*Best Home Cinema Receiver 2009-2010
Denon AVR-1910*

Denon's dark star

Richard Stevenson enjoys a BD deck with a mean and moody streak



It's not like Denon to sell on price, well, not a low one anyway. From the company that brought us the £13,000 AVP-A1HD AV pre-power amplifier system comes its latest 'affordable', fully-featured, Profile 2.0 budget-busting Blu-ray player. Unfortunately, at £400 it costs the same as two PlayStation 3s.

Is it twice as good as said gaming console box-of-tricks? Not if you want top-notch game-play, web-surfing and an occasional movie in passable quality. On the other hand, if you want smooth-as-silk pictures and high-quality cinema sound with every Blu-ray or DVD you play, then it's game over for the PS3.

The DBP-1610 is a barnstorming Blu-ray disc-spinner packing in high-quality DVD upscaling, DivX HD and AVCHD support, and a front SD card slot for BD-Live material. There's decoding for Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD MA audio formats, but this is only output over HDMI and not analogue 5.1 outputs – if you have a non-HDMI amp this isn't the baby for you. The Ethernet connection also allows over-air firmware updates, which our sample needed and executed with consummate ease.

Denon-esque touches that elevate this player above the mainstream include independent block design to separate critical audio and video signals from RF-noise-generating devices like the power supply, and 24bit/192KHz DACs. You also get an independent analogue stereo output, fed from sassy Burr-Brown audiophile DACs

should you have a high-fidelity musical inclination.

Picture precision

Straight out of the box, this is not a deck that will sear your retinas. What the DBP-1610 is all about is accuracy and detail – and it does both with an easy gait. First off, you are going to think the picture is maybe a bit bland and reach for the controls – but resist. Navigate the sometimes sluggish menus and watch a movie first to appreciate what the DBP-1610 does best.

With *I Am Legend* on BD, New York's early morning sunshine has a warm, realistic feeling. The smooth and muted colours of the desolate cityscape are beautifully crafted, and big-scale scenes pan absolutely seamlessly (the PS3 makes this scene look like the camera dolly is running on square wheels). And then wham, the poppy-red Shelby Mustang bursts onto the screen with deep, deep colour depth and a sound to savour. The roar of its engine and deep bass effects are punched out with true Denon-level accuracy and pace, which does wonders for the adrenaline-fuelled deer chase scene.

Overall, DBP-1610's presentation is certainly a little darker and moodier than its more upfront and in-your-face competitors, but it does foreboding tension with breath-holding precision. A slight loss of fidelity in shadows and a little bleaching in very bright areas let you know this isn't one of the £1,000+ super-players, but at £400 it's a real delight ●

AV/CV

Product: Fully spec'd Profile 2.0 player for under £400

Positioning: The lowliest of Denon's five Blu-ray decks

Peers: Pioneer BDP-LX52; Onkyo DV-BD507; Yamaha BD-S2900

Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



Idling: You could leave this deck switched on and it wouldn't hurt your electricity bill too much

Playing: When playing, power consumption rises to 19W – an average figure for a BD player

Audio Jitter: Ps



Analogue: This is an excellent jitter result, illustrating the Denon's audiophile design

Loading: Boot/Java

Boot speed & tray eject 16s
Tray in to main BD menu 90s

Disc loading & Java: Not the slowest device to boot, but no sprinter; Java loading, however, is about as slow as anything we've seen



HCC VERDICT

Denon DBP-1610
£400 Approx

Highs: Good, natural-looking picture; audio performance; great value
Lows: Picture not as punchy as some; no analogue outs; slow menus on some discs

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5
Design: 1 2 3 4 5
Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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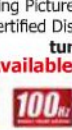
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Panasonic

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50" HD Ready Digital Plasma TV with 100Hz Double Scan, Superb Image Quality & Smart Networking with VIERA Link
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£699.95

TXL32V10 + DMPBD60

FREE! 5 YEAR WARRANTY



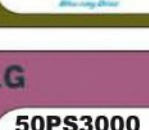
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Red-rich revolution

Panasonic builds on its superb LCD projector line with a new red-rich lamp. **Jim Hill** applauds the improvement

Panasonic's PT-AE4000 looks like the same big, grey shoebox the brand has been touting as a projector for the last three years. Indeed, there's no visible difference between this and the outgoing PT-AE3000, but for good reason – it's a shoebox with a remarkably successful lineage and exquisite picture quality.

While the unapologetically dull and corporate casing remains the same, inside you'll find a new kind of lamp that promises better colour and contrast, and more of the picture-enhancing features that have made this series of projectors a favourite among home cinema enthusiasts.

Panasonic says it's aiming at the 'prosumer' with this model. That basically equates to an uncompromisingly specified Full HD PJ with the functional styling of studio equipment, but with a user-friendly interface, Viera Link control and an image that's best-suited to a large living room. It builds on everything we loved about the AE3000 – flexible lens-shift options, filmic 1080p picture quality and easy 2.35:1 screen ratio – and adds a new red-rich lamp and an improved dynamic iris. In fact, this PJ now packs more picture-enhancing tech and bonus features than any I've seen so far.

As you'd expect from its moniker, the red-rich lamp in this unit produces a slightly warmer colour tone than is traditionally delivered by

LCD-based projectors. It's not just the red that's improved though; with a decent Blu-ray transfer like *The Day After Tomorrow*, the colours struck me as more lush and lifelike across the spectrum. Strong, rich tones are this projector's *forté*. And while the red-rich lamp gives the scenes in the New York library a kind of luminous glow, the PT-AE4000 exhibits a consistency and smooth gradation of hues, making the whole chapter more believable – despite Roland Emmerich's heavy use of CGI and killer wolves...

Panasonic's projectors haven't been the brightest in the past, but this is where the new lamp again has an impact. Select one of the three Cinema preset modes and the general brightness level is still very low, but in Normal and Dynamic modes the extra punch makes the image appreciably lighter than its predecessor, and more suitable for viewing in fairly well-lit conditions. In fact, it's in Dynamic mode that the Panasonic delivered its best contrast measurement in our Tech Labs, an eye-opening 95,056:1. However,



AV/CV

Product: Full HD LCD front projector

Position: Panasonic's new flagship projector

Peers: Mitsubishi HC6500; Sanyo PLV-Z700; Panasonic PT-AE3000



→ Specifications

HD Ready: YES 1080p24
Component video: YES 1 input
HDMI: YES 2 x v1.3
PC input: YES 1 D-Sub 15-pin
Resolution: 1,920 x 1,080
Brightness (claimed): 1,600 ANSI lumens
Contrast ratio (claimed): 100,000:1
Dimensions:
 460 (w) x 130 (h) x 300 (d) mm
Weight: 7.2kg
Features: Red-Rich lamp; Deep Colour; x.v.Colour; Frame Creation (frame interpolation); Smooth Screen Filter (smoothes panel structure); fan noise 22dB; 1 x S-video input, 1 x composite input; RS232 control; remote control; 40-300in projection size diagonally; 1.2m-18.0m throw distance (16:9); lamp life 2,000 hours

I wouldn't advise you use this mode for movie playback – it's simply too bright, and will most likely lessen the life expectancy of your lamp (and probably your eyeballs).

You've been framed

The PT-AE4000 sports the latest iteration of Panasonic's Frame Creation technology, which inserts frames to make motion smoother. It's enough to prevent the judder that can accompany the camera pan in the opening sequence of *TDAT* when less-efficient processors are used, but

I have reservations about high frame-rate movie playback. The projector offers a sliding scale of acceleration, and when first presented to *HCC*, Panasonic enthusiastically demonstrated the feature. But while it makes images super smooth, it has a disastrous effect on movies, removing all sense of cinematic tone and flow. It works well for Sky Sports HD playback, but otherwise I'd advise caution.

With Panasonic's NeoPDP plasma panels ripping up a storm in terms of black levels, it's no surprise to also

Not for show: The PT-AE4000 is built to be ceiling-mounted, hence the non-flashy design

find its premium projector doing a decent job in this regard. However, it's an area where Sony and JVC, with their LCoS-based PJs, are arguably stronger. In terms of contrast, particularly resolving the detail in very dark scenes, there's some room for improvement. And conversely, *TDAT*'s garish scenes set in the Antarctic look impressively white, but lacking a little in detail.

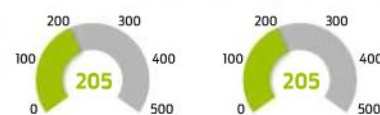
Setup made simple

The sheer flexibility of the PT-AE4000 is astonishing, with all



→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts

**White screen:**

Around average for this type of device; in Dynamic mode, consumption increases by around 20W

Test footage:

Interestingly, there is no measurable difference between power usage in white screen and live video mode

TV Contrast: ratio

**Picture:**

Contrast ratio in Normal mode measures relatively low at 4,266:1, while in Dynamic mode it's up to 95,056:1, nearing the claimed level. Luminance in Dynamic mode is high at 31,949fl

Colour accuracy



Presets: A small range of scene presets (CT is infinitely variable) – but full control over separate R/G/B levels allows for perfect adjustment.

Normal: 8,570K
Colour 1: 5,773K
Colour 2: 5,824K
Cinema 1: 6,030K
Cinema 2: 6,943K
Cinema 3: 7,935K

Scarlet fever:

The red-rich lamp helps deliver warm vibrant colours

manner of setup options and helpful calibration tools. For starters, it has an extremely wide zoom and optical lens shift range. This means it'll fill a screen of up to five metres from the middle or back of the room, with plenty of scope to adjust the image without ever needing to resort to digital keystone correction. It's all motorised, too, so you can do all this, and even focus, from your armchair.

Additionally, Panasonic has finally decided to fit two 12V triggers to its flagship home cinema projector, making it – at last – a model we can recommend to someone wanting to integrate it with an electric screen.

For those with a variable aspect ratio 16:9/21:9 screen, the PJ also has a Cinemascope 2.35:1 zoom mode. This means you can optimise a wider aspect ratio and commit it to memory. The projector will zoom the image to fit the larger screen area, although this also means the black bar area is projected above and below the screen. **If you were thinking of buying a projector and adding an anamorphic lens, this solution could save you a lot of expense.**

A 1080p24 feed from a Blu-ray player yields the best results, with a beautifully filmic and detailed image. Panasonic's Smooth Screen Filter technology essentially smoothes out visible pixel structure, but manages to avoid any kind of soft focus. Unsurprisingly, DVD doesn't fare so well when blown up to fill a six-foot

display, but the video upconversion here is reasonably good.

Despite the industrial-looking design, this is a very consumer-friendly projector, with three HDMI ports and a quiet fan that leaks just a little noise and light from the front. Its flat shape means that it has quite a low profile when ceiling-mounted, and, of course, the matt black finish makes it all but disappear in a dark room. It also has a simple-to-use interface. The PT-AE4000's bundled remote is tiny, but it's backlit and can still use Viera Link to locate, for example, the SD card loaded in a connected Panasonic Blu-ray player.

One unique feature of Panasonic's home cinema PJs that never fails to impress is the fascinating waveform monitor that can be superimposed on the screen at any time. By analysing the light and dark parts of the screen, it can draw detailed plots of various aspects of the image, which can be useful for making very fine adjustments to colour temperature, colour saturation, brightness, contrast or gamma. There's also a more basic split-screen feature, and this is probably what you'll use more often, as it provides a side-by-side comparison of the original image and your tweaked version.

A worthy successor

I've been impressed by each version of Panasonic's 'prosumer' projectors and this latest is no disappointment. It's actually a very small step forwards, with the rich-red lamp being the standout new feature – it brings genuine improvements in colour and luminance. It's also one of the most flexible projectors in terms of installation and carries more useful features than anything I've seen at this price point. My only reservation is the thought that there might be some deals to be found on the outgoing PT-AE3000E... ●

Victory!:

After persistent criticism, Panasonic has added 12V triggers to its home cinema projector

**HCC VERDICT**

Panasonic PT-AE4000
£2,500 Approx

Highs: Easy to setup and operate; wide zoom and optical lens shift range; lush colours; smooth, filmic picture; useful features

Lows: Boxy design; some forward-firing fan noise; take care with the high frame-rate settings

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

fantastic value

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AV/CV

Product:

5.1 array aimed at entry-level-with-taste buyers

Position:

The first set of cinema speakers from Roth Audio

Peers:

Polk Audio RM95; Harman Kardon HKT S11; Mordaunt Short Alumni 5.1

Since its launch in 2007, the Roth Audio name has become synonymous with the world of high-end iPod docks, particularly its MC4 vacuum tube amp, which looks exquisite and, by all accounts, sounds nifty, too. Now, Roth Audio has moved into the home cinema arena with its OLi speakers.

This 5.1 system is intended to hit a low price point, yet aspires to combine both looks and performance. In many ways Roth Audio has achieved this, but there are caveats. The sound is big and brash but it needs to be carefully partnered with sympathetic electronics. I found the splashy highs from the 1in tweeters got a little tiring and the 8in, 125W subwoofer hasn't really got enough weight to it. Don't get me wrong, **hear this system recounting Mars Attacks, and you'll be impressed** by its rapid attack, but spin a bit of multichannel music (am I the only one with a 5.1 DTS disc collection?) or a lossless audio extravaganza and the affordable nature of these speakers begins to stick out like a Terminator's face bones.

Clever cabinets

The cabinets of the OLi 1s, OLi 3s and the OLi C2 are cleverly tapered, and the use of glass fibre for the cones gives a lot of the benefits of kevlar and carbon but with less cost.

In terms of style, these are a good shot at the goal by Roth's US-based designers. They're exquisite to behold, with a mixture of black wood and gloss-black lacquer that'll blend easily into most rooms, particularly those with a 'lifestyle' bent. The use of steel rods to mount the grilles and Allen-headed fixings pinning the glass fibre drivers means this system looks neat with the grilles off, too.

Certainly, this set is intriguing enough for me to hanker after a bigger system. A little more soul and general attention to detail wouldn't go amiss.

Setup is slightly hampered by a manual that mixes metric and imperial dimensions and a confusing explanation for what the control buttons do on the OLi KH2 subwoofer. You're meant to press the button with the picture of your speakers' general size on it, but the images in the manual are transposed. Which bit do you believe? This could easily hinder, rather than help, the unwary.

Anyway, the weak point of the system is the subwoofer. No matter what I did, the subwoofer's 125W motor didn't set my world on fire, although I could make out some difference in general shape of the bass with the different EQ presets. The panel used to control everything on the top looks like it ought to be clever, but two knobs and a bypass switch on the back would have been just as efficient.

The subwoofer does have a nice smooth output, though. It's kinda like a Nissan Micra – comfy, clean, and perfectly acceptable if you want to do sixty. A version with 10in drivers and a more potent amp would be well-worth auditioning.

Well considered

The OLi 3 system ticks lots of boxes, and for a fragment of the cost of some other brands. Personally, I would have preferred deeper bass, and some extra clarity to voices. Despite that, this is a well-considered first foray into home cinema by Roth Audio, and would similarly make a good first system for anyone looking to add surround sound to their flatscreen experience – you get a lot of well-built, sexy-looking kit for your money ●

→ Specifications

Roth Audio OLi 3 (floorstanders)

Drive Units: 2 x 5.25in fibreglass hybrid cones; 1in soft dome tweeter
Enclosure: 2-way rear ported
Frequency Response: 45Hz-20kHz
Sensitivity: 90dB (2.83V @ 1m)
Power Handling: 150W
Dimensions: 205(w) x 870(h) x 246(d)mm

Roth Audio OLi C2 (centre)

Drive Units: 2 x 5.25in fibreglass hybrid cones; 1in soft dome tweeter
Enclosure: Rear ported
Frequency Response: 55Hz-20kHz
Sensitivity: 88dB (2.83V @ 1m)
Power Handling: 125W
Dimensions: 535(w) x 180(h) x 230(d)mm

Roth Audio OLi 1 (surrounds)

Drive Units: 4in fibreglass hybrid cone; 1in soft dome tweeter
Enclosure: Rear ported
Frequency Response: 60Hz-20kHz
Sensitivity: 88dB (2.83V @ 1m)
Power Handling: 100W
Dimensions: 152(w) x 239(h) x 178(d)mm

Roth Audio OLi KH2 (subwoofer)

Drive Unit: 8in PolyCel cone driver with two 8in passive radiating flat diaphragms
Enclosure: Passive radiating
Frequency Response: 35Hz-150Hz
On board power: 125W
Dimensions: 330(w) x 330(h) x 360(d)mm
Connections: Phono input for mono LFE; stereo high level connections

HCC VERDICT

Roth Audio OLi 3 system
£650 Approx

Highs: Very pretty and made with good-looking components; low-priced for what you get

Lows: The subwoofer is underpowered; can sound splashy and harsh when driven loud

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



For best listening results, Roth Audio recommends removing the grilles – we think the OLis look better that way, too

Nine-carat gold

Is there anything this feature-packed 9.2-channel HD receiver from Onkyo can't do? **Alvin Gold** investigates



AV/CV

Product:
9.2-channel
AVR with
height/width
processing and
features galore

Positioning:
Right near the
top of the
Onkyo AVR tree

Peers:
Pioneer
SC-LX82;
Denon
AVR-4310;
Yamaha DSP-Z7



Hi-fi amplifiers and receivers are straightforward devices, built simply to make the best-sounding noises that their designers know how. They're generally not heavy on user features, because all non-essential circuitry inevitably degrades sound quality to some extent. By and large you can tell which are the good ones because they are stripped down and

minimalist in tone. They rarely have tone controls, DSP or other toys, and even more rarely are they the most powerful in their price class.

Home cinema amps are something else. Most of them receive radio broadcasts (and so become 'receivers'), often via the internet, in addition to FM, MW and sometimes DAB. But they have other purposes, too. They are designed to handle a wide range of sources of different types, often in digital form from a Blu-ray player, and convert it into a multichannel feed via a spatial processor based on Dolby and/or DTS technology. It will usually be required to feed 5, 8 or even nine loudspeakers plus a subwoofer or two. For a variety of reasons, the requirement to do more than simply amplify has become rampant; so much so that Onkyo, purveyor of the TX-NR3007 auditioned here, is working on a stripped-down model intended to put sound quality first, and which will have the absolute minimum of unnecessary trimmings. Personally, I can't wait, but don't expect to hear more about it for a while.

Meanwhile, this AVR has no such minimalist pretensions. It is best regarded as a toolkit for moulding the sound into your chosen pattern and, as I discovered, it's very powerful and flexible.

Challenging for the top

A 9.2-channel (count 'em) THX Ultra2 Plus receiver, the TX-NR3007 is second only to the top-of-the-range TX-NR5007. It has one fewer HDMI input, one less audio input (but you still get plenty of both) and a slightly simplified arrangement of power transformers. There are three here: an open frame power transformer, and one each for the remaining audio and video circuits. Onkyo sells a simpler model too, this time with a single mains transformer, the £1,300 TX-NR1007.

THX Ultra2 Plus is an enhanced version of the familiar THX Ultra2, optimised for slightly larger rooms where the listener-to-main speaker distance is 4 metres or more (although less is okay, too), and with an enclosed 85 cubic metres or more – a really big room in other words. It also has an enhanced volume control system called THX Loudness Plus, which enriches the ambient soundfield when listening at lower volume than the THX-specified level.

As for other highlights, the TX-NR3007 is said to be currently the only receiver available in this

price-range with ISF (Imaging Sciences Foundation) video calibration. It allows the user to calibrate the receiver to the screen, independently of any calibration available on the display itself. With ISF, parameters like brightness, hue, contrast saturation and gamma can be set individually for each video input. Elsewhere, **HQV's powerful Reon VX processor can be used to upscale standard-def video – very effectively as it turns out** – while audio conversion uses proprietary VLSC circuitry, 24/192 DACs with Texas Instruments jitter-reduction technology. Tasty.

Last but not least, the Onkyo is one of the few receivers capable of processing DSD (the file format of SACD) natively, without prior conversion to PCM.

The Onkyo's room calibration is handled by Audyssey's MultEQ. This takes an age to tune itself, and works in conjunction with Dolby Volume, and two Audyssey technologies called Dynamic EQ and Dynamic Volume that 'optimise the frequency response and dynamic range at all volume levels'.

This machine knows a thing or two about radio, as well. The powerful vTuner suite, which is one of the most capable (and usable) of its kind, is specified for 'net radio reception, although the NX3007 also has its own FM/MW preset tuner, and an optional external DAB+ box can be added. The Last FM radio and music community website is also

→ Specifications

Dolby Digital TrueHD: YES plus Digital, Digital Plus, EX and Pro Logic IIz
DTS-HD Master Audio: YES plus DTS, DTS+, ES, Neo:6, DTS 96/24, DTS Express, DTS-HD High Resolution
THX: YES THX Ultra2 Plus
Multichannel audio: YES 9 x 200W amplifiers
Multichannel input: YES 71 phono
Multiroom: YES main plus two zones
AV inputs: YES 4 x S-video, 5 x composite; 6 x digital audio (3 x coaxial, 3 x optical)
HDMI input/output: YES 7-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Video upscaling: YES to 1080p
Component: YES 3-in, 1-out
Dimensions: 435(w) x 199(h) x 363(d)mm
Weight: 25kg
Features: Ethernet; DLNA 1.5 and Windows 7-compatible networking; Audyssey DSX and Dolby Pro Logic IIz decoders; HQV Reon VX video processor; ISF Video calibration; four dedicated DSP modes for gamers; front/rear USB ports for firmware updates

You can also get the NR3007 in a silver finish



Power up: Nine 200W amplifiers provide the punch for every audio format under the sun

supported through Windows 7, which utilises DLNA 1.5 'Play To' streaming. The Ethernet port provided also allows for easy firmware updating over the internet.

Working with the various surround iterations that are built-in, the Onkyo confirmed my long-standing preference for Dolby over DTS, which tends to sound more neutral, open and spacious. DTS works well enough, but with an added warmth and a slight loss of detail – the overall effect is clearly less natural.

All in clover

Some of the most impressive results during my testing period were from one of the best Blu-ray discs to date – *Cloverfield* – using Dolby TrueHD with the 3007's extra two channels configured for height thanks to Audyssey's DSX processing. The result was remarkably solid and three-dimensional, even when auditioned from well off the system centre-line. Special effects and explosions were stunningly – almost frighteningly – realistic.

But spatial decoding is a moving target, evolving with the release of more films on Blu-ray. When it's good, it's very good, but all too often it disappoints. *Cloverfield* and a handful of others (such as the 007 vehicle *Quantum of Solace* – a very impressive soundtrack – see the HCC Movie Awards on p23), hint at what the medium is capable of. And I have an excellent classical collection to hand, *Trondheim Solistene*, which is supplied as a multidisc set – Blu-ray, DVD (LPCM) and SACD (DSD). The latter sounded brilliant, the Onkyo doing a clearly better job with the DSD track from the SACD disc than the PCM output of the Blu-ray disc.

The TX-NR3007 truly ups the ante of what can be achieved by an AVR at this price point. I had no problems operating it, after some false starts, partly related to pressing the wrong menu options or remote control buttons on the artlessly designed handset. If I have a criticism of the receiver it is that although the features I dabbled with appeared to behave as advertised, the detailed setup needs meticulous care to optimise. Having said that, the Onkyo is more straightforward than most of its peers to configure thanks to a straightforward and easily comprehended OSD.

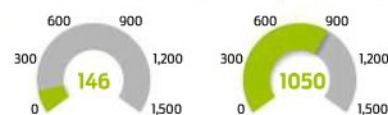
I am grateful for (and was relieved to receive) the help provided by an Onkyo representative who helped with system setup and by imparting his knowledge of some of the more complex features. Even so, getting to grips with this feature-laden receiver is a formidable enterprise. There wasn't the opportunity to use a THX Ultra2 specified speaker system, but in my judgement this isn't strictly necessary. Well-chosen speakers of mixed parentage are likely to do as good, or a better job, at reasonable volume levels in most rooms.

In most respects, the Onkyo is outstandingly capable, and great value for money, yet I do worry the

unending arms race of new technologies puts many people off buying models like this, and impedes the growth of the market for high-performance home cinema as a whole. However, this does not detract from the Onkyo's class-leading flexibility, or its sound quality performance, which was borderline excellent for much of the time, and sometimes simply breathtaking ●

→ Tech Labs

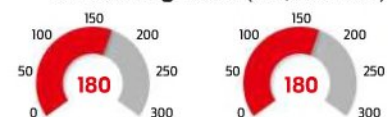
Power consumption: Watts



Idling: Such a powerful amp, it's no surprise that it gobbles up power even when it's in standby

Powered: Pretty much what you would expect for consumption in 5.1 multichannel mode

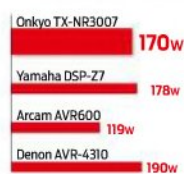
Power ratings: Watts (8Ω, 0.5% THD)



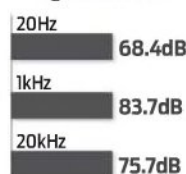
2-channel 8Ω: Specification is 200W per channel at 6Ω, so this 8Ω figure is well up to scratch

5-channel 8Ω: Again, power rating in 5-channel mode is impressive

Untainted: Watts



Signal/noise: dB



Fidelity firewall:

A good result considering the specification of this mid-to-high-end monster receiver

S/N tests:

The NR3007 delivered very good results across the whole range of frequencies



HCC VERDICT

Onkyo TX-NR3007
£1,700 Approx

Highs: Unfeasibly well-equipped; excellent audio performance and SD upscaling

Lows: Looks a bit bland; huge feature list will take some exploring

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Future of TV

LG's use of LED technology means the SL9000 series offers a peerless viewing experience

LG's new SL9000 Series TVs offer the thinnest sets and clearest picture, and they are incredibly energy-efficient.

The stylish SL9000, with its unique flush-fitting screen and dazzling LED backlighting, is only 29.3mm thick, yet still manages to provide astounding picture quality with a 3,000,000:1 contrast ratio. It's also efficient enough to shave up to 40 per cent off your energy bill.

Thanks to LG's ground-breaking LED technology and innovative design, the SL9000 series has been allowed to slim down and swap the restricting frame for a seamless single layer of glass, which fits flush just like an infinity swimming pool.

There are 42in and 47in models available, both of which come fully equipped with four HDMI ports to hook up your Blu-ray player and other devices. There's even Bluetooth compatibility, to wirelessly beam your latest snaps and music to the full-HD 1080p screen.

In short, this is the ultimate hi-def experience for your home. Brilliant.

The details

A Frameless design

The SL9000's unique, single-layer design virtually eliminates the space between the screen and bezel, for a seamless look

B Ultra-slim

LEDs around the perimeter of the frame enable the SL9000 to be just 29.3mm thick

C Entertainment hub

With four HDMI ports, USB (with HD Movie playback), Bluetooth and PC input, you can connect the SL9000 to all your media

D Picture perfect

With a contrast ratio of 3,000,000:1, the SL9000 delivers ultra-crisp images and deeper blacks

E Power saver

LG LED technology saves you up to 40 per cent on your energy bills and the SL9000 is also certified by the Energy Saving Trust

WHICH LG TV IS RIGHT FOR YOU? STEP 2 of 7

Back a question Where will this TV be located in your home?

Livingroom

Best HD TV for your needs

42PQ9000 42SL9000 42UL9000 42UT9000 42VW9000 42VW9000 42VW9000 42VW9000

Play video Play video Play video Play video Play video Play video Play video Play video

Click for review Click for review

The LG TV Buyers Guide

LG offers so many cutting-edge TV technologies, from integrated Freesat HD tuners bringing subscription-free hi-def channels to picture-enhancing 100Hz processing, that choosing the perfect set could be a little daunting. Don't panic, our simple step-by-step online guide will help you find your ideal LG TV in just a few quick clicks.

www.lge.co.uk/tvguide

Crystal clear audio

Jim Hill looks through a 5.1 system from a glass speaker specialist



→ Specifications

Serio satellites

Drive units: 1x 3.1in mid/bass driver
Frequency response: (+/-3dB)
180Hz-20kHz
Sensitivity: 87dB
Power handling: 150W
Dimensions: 125(w) x 125(h)
x 85(d) mm
Weight: 1kg

High Force 1 subwoofer

Drive units: 1x 9in bass driver
Frequency response: 38Hz-150Hz
Onboard power: 150W
Dimensions: 250(w) x 260(h) x
280(d)mm
Weight: 15kg



AV/CV

Product:
'Lifestyle'
5.1 sub/sat
speaker system

Position:
One of four
Ultra Flat Line
products in
Waterfall's
lineup

Peers:
Tannoy Arena;
Cabasse Eole 2

Waterfall made quite a splash, if you'll excuse the obvious pun, with its attention-grabbing, all-glass Niagara speakers. But at \$53,000 a pair, I suspect that the French company is likely to have more commercial luck with this seriously scaled-down sub/satellite system that embraces much the same design aesthetic. The five speakers are made of slightly more practical cast aluminium cabinets this time, but they're mounted in thick glass, giving them their distinctive Waterfall twist.

Waterfall's use of glass to frame its single drive units makes the speakers look like ornaments, but it's not all for show – these speakers are beautifully built. The rigid safety glass is heavy and helps anchor the rubber-footed cabinets to the tabletop, thereby reducing unwanted vibration. **Also interesting is the brand's so-called Heatstream technology that allows the speakers to dissipate heat through the cabinet**, and output 150W of peak power – and far more volume – than is normal from such diminutive boxes.

Similarly, the subwoofer, dubbed the High Force HFI, is comically compact, but capable of an astonishing level of noise. Measuring little more than a foot on all sides, it squats on spikes with a forward-firing 9in bass driver. It looks harmless enough, but you risk putting your back out when lifting it from the box – its largely metal construction makes it super rigid and pushes the weight over 15kg.

Bring on the wall

Being flat makes the Serio satellites the perfect partners for a flatscreen TV, and they sound best when mounted on their spiked wall mounts. The small enclosure obviously limits their output, but the wall, in this case, provides bass reinforcement.

In fact, these boxes create a larger soundfield than they have any right to. I partnered this sexy set with a fairly high-powered Marantz SR6003 amplifier that was able to really make the drive units sing. I loved their very open upper mid-band and precise treble.

The crossover point is quite high, which means a lot of work for the little subwoofer, but this isn't a problem – the sub's 150W amplifier mercilessly drives the woofer to

produce a surprisingly potent output, giving the system a punchy low-end. It gives music an appealing snappy pace with rhythmic basslines and crisp treble detail. Classical music, in particular, thrives on the clear upper range, so with the *Trondheim Solistene: Divertimenti* Blu-ray (DTS-MA 5.1), the strings soar, while electronic music benefits from the fast bass.

Movies are always a more serious challenge for smaller sub/sat systems. The trouble is, it's actually very difficult to get a smooth crossover between speakers and sub. Care needs to be used with the setup to prevent the bass sounding disembodied. If I do have a criticism, it's that the midrange could do with more clarity and focus. Dialogue can lack presence through the centre channel, too, and the front soundstage hasn't got the cohesion typical of a larger speaker system. But then this system is far from ordinary.

Note that the cable management has been designed to accept only thin bare wire cables, which may impact on how you wire up your kit.

Clever and appealing

It's tempting to write off the Serio 5.1 system off as boutique speakers targeted at interior designers, but listen closely and you'll realise they do manage to throw a remarkably clear, open and revealing sound around into the room. I think Waterfall is definitely onto something with these clever and appealing speakers. Their style is clear to see ●



HCC VERDICT

Waterfall Serio 5.1
£1,500 Approx

Highs: Attractive design; musical treble; practical wall-mount solution; impressive subwoofer

Lows: Weak centre channel; disjointed bass; front soundstage lacks cohesion

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

HD Ready: YES Full HD, 1080p24
Tuner: YES Freeview and CI slot
Component video: YES one input
HDMI: YES 4 x v1.3 HDMI
PC input: YES
Resolution: 1920 x 1080
Brightness (claimed): 500 cd/m²
Contrast ratio (claimed): 2,000,000:1
Dimensions (w/o stand): 733(h)
1,158(w) x 113(d)mm
Weight (w/o stand): 30.3kg
Features: Ethernet; Resolution+;
Meta Brain; Active Vision
M200HD; Game Mode; Dolby
Digital Plus; Dolby Volume; Nicam
Stereo; 8-day EPG, DLNA-
certified; 2 x Scart (1 RGB)



The 46SV685DB features a local-dimming LED backlight



Flagship fantasy

Sam Kiildsen says Tosh's late entry to the LED arena was worth waiting for



The 46SV685DB is Toshiba's debut LED-backlit television, a variant on traditional LCD that is fast-becoming commonplace. With its £2,500 price tag, it feels like a shift in focus for the brand. Is it trying to find a spot in the market away from the likes of Samsung and Sony?

Unlike those manufacturers who have used LEDs at the edges of screens, allowing the TVs to be superthin, Toshiba has opted to stick with rear-mounted LEDs and local-dimming technology for its SV series. For those who don't know, local dimming allows clusters of LEDs to be independently controlled, meaning the screen can keep portions of the image bright while cutting the lighting on other parts. This makes the gulf between a TV's brightest and darkest limits far wider than possible using standard lamps.

Black gold

Toshiba has put the tech to good effect – the picture quality of the 46SV685 is absolutely stonking. It's not the skinniest or most attractive screen around, but from a performance perspective it's immensely impressive.

Hook up a Blu-ray player and you'll immediately see the improvement in contrast over a regular LCD television. Whacking on the first part of Steven Soderbergh's epic biopic *Che*, I noticed straight away that the black parts of the screen during the scene-setting map animation were almost totally, well, black – while the movie in the middle remained vivid and vibrant. Even the most accomplished of standard LCD TVs struggle to make black look black while giving the rest of the image – the bits that should be bright – real depth, but that's not an issue for the 46SV685.

This ability to deliver both deep, dark blacks and bright whites carries over into everything you watch, of course. The new *Pro Evolution Soccer* title for the PS3 looks utterly gorgeous; the pitch is rendered a lush, deep green while bright, white-shirted players all but leap off the screen.

Contrast is at its best when you're sitting directly face-on to the screen. Move just a little to the left or right and the black levels drop off.

Killer contrast is only one feather in the 46SV685's cap, another is Toshiba's Resolution+ processing, which upscales the source image to deliver what Tosh claims is a 'near HD' standard-def picture. **It works well, enhancing the edges and generally sharpening up anything you chuck at it** – even HD material and video games get a noticeable detail boost.

Toshiba has been generous with its features and specification; alongside the four HDMI inputs is a wealth of multimedia compatibility, with an SD card slot, USB port and Ethernet connection allowing access to digital music, photo and movie files without the need to connect a separate source. I would never recommend a TV as a music source – even though the TV's built-in speakers are surprisingly good at creating a dynamic, full-bodied sound – but it's fine for photo slideshows and copes well with DivX-encoded videos.

This is a mighty impressive screen that will improve almost anyone's home entertainment setup, but the 46SV685's asking price certainly isn't going to fall into everyone's budget. It's very expensive, to be honest, but I can see that price tag falling sharply in the coming months.

AV/CV

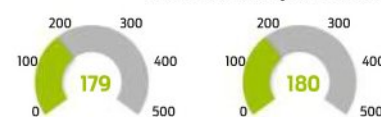
Product: 46in 1080p LCD TV with LED backlighting, local dimming and Toshiba's proprietary Resolution+ upscaling

Position: High-end. Toshiba also makes a 55in LED model, and the 47ZV635 is the closest non-LED backlit model

Peers: Philips 40PFL9704, Sony KDL-46X4500

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



White screen: An average result for an LED-lit screen of this size; AutoView reduces usage by about 99W in dim lighting

Test footage: Very little increase in consumption at full volume test footage, and it's less than Toshiba's own 243W figure

Contrast: ratio



Picture: Toshiba's contrast ratio claim has to be taken with a pinch of salt, but the measured result is impressive. And luminance is high at 77.34fl

Colour temp: Kelvin



Presets: 11 preset CT modes are joined by comprehensive manual offset/gain for perfect adjustment of R/G/B balance.
0: 5,581K
2: 6,600K
6: 8,035K
10: 9,977K

HCC VERDICT

Toshiba 46SV685DB
£2,500 Approx

Highs: Excellent contrast and detail; good quality audio; multimedia talents
Lows: Price point; not particularly thin or stylish

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



ADVERTISEMENT



Seeing is believing

looking for a Home Cinema

How easy is it to buy a home cinema system that suits you? You could read the magazine product reviews, find out who sells the recommendations, five-star favourites or best buys at the cheapest price and place your order. When the system is delivered to your door in the box, you get a friend who knows his onions to install it - and live happily ever after.

This is a fairly well-trodden path but it leads to dissatisfaction and a lot of wasted money. Besides there being a bewildering choice of components on the market today, there are also different ways in which components can be installed and connected together. Which sort of visual system do you go for? Projector and screen, plasma or LCD, an HD ready set or one with full 1080p capability? And on the audio side do you plump for a 5.1 or 7.1 speaker system, passive or active sub, and where do you site them for the best results? The choice of home cinema amp raises even more questions. Will you be listening to music through the same system? If so, you need an amp that approaches the performance of a decent 2-channel hi-fi amp, which is not that easy to find. Do you need SACD, DVD-Audio, or Blu-ray capability? How many inputs do you need for video, s-video, component, coaxial digital, optical digital and HDMI? The above are just a small percentage of the decisions that must be made. In short, it's complicated and very fertile ground for getting it wrong.

Achieving potential

To select a system, you could choose a collection of 'Best Buy' components in the hope that they will be a great combination. Maybe, but probably not. You could buy a pre-packaged all-in-one system from one manufacturer.

This is almost certainly not the best route either as you will miss out on enormous potential. From informal surveys conducted, it appears highly likely that **the majority of home cinema systems selected and installed on a DIY basis, that is without professional input, are performing at way below their optimum level.** To compound matters, most are also ill-matched to the room in which they are installed and are, in reality, the wrong system. Without considerable knowledge or experience, high quality home cinema is not a suitable DIY activity.

Our aim must be to buy a home cinema system that will provide an excellent picture quality plus an audio delivery that will match, or even better, the commercial cinema experience. It must be exciting, reliable and deliver true value for money.

What and Where to buy

To ensure a home cinema system is right for you, where do you start? Here's an important tip ... **don't** start with **WHAT**, start with **WHERE**. There's only one way to give yourself the best chance of getting it right first time, and that's through a specialist AV dealer. It's possible you have preconceived ideas that put you off visiting one. Although you would welcome the advice and guidance, you don't know the technical jargon. You don't want to be talked down to. Your friend has said they only sell expensive gear and they're not interested if you don't have a big budget. They're expensive. These are just myths.

Most specialist AV dealers are running their business because, above all, home cinema is their hobby. They spend a large portion of their time comparing systems to get the best possible results. They know the component combinations which don't gel together and, conversely, they know the combinations which give the best performance within a given price range. Very importantly, they know how to get a system working to its optimum. But they all also know the system must suit **you**.

“...without considerable knowledge or experience, high quality home cinema is not a suitable DIY activity”

cinema

LISTED HERE ARE 20 OF THE BEST AV SHOPS IN THE COUNTRY.

Listed on this page are 20 of the best AV shops in the country. They have been selected because they are known to do an excellent job in guiding customers towards home cinema systems that will provide years of superlative performance and total satisfaction.

STAR QUALITIES

VALUE FOR MONEY



SERVICE



FACILITIES



VERDICT



Buying or being sold to?

There are dealers around, web based or otherwise, who will sell you anything you are willing to pay for. They may be a bit cheaper but that's all they offer. Now there's a group of long-established specialist dealers who are totally committed to putting the customer first. Their idea of 'selling' is to discuss your requirements, offer their advice, give you the best options, then play the systems for you and allow you to be the judge. You'll probably be surprised and, almost certainly, relieved to discover how easy it is to see and hear the differences between components and between systems. You'll be able to make a clear and informed decision about what to buy.

The story doesn't end there. These shops won't abandon you once you've put your hand in your pocket. They won't leave you to set up the system you've selected as best you can. They'll install it in your home, make sure it performs to

its best, and ensure you're entirely happy with the way it works. Why? Because a high proportion of these dealers' custom comes through people who have bought from them before, either directly or by recommendation. It's vital to them to get it right for you.

Getting the best deal

Unless you've got money to burn, you'll be living with your new system for years. Most of these dealers offer much longer equipment guarantees than provided by the manufacturer, a very worthwhile benefit, but it also makes it in the dealer's interest to ensure high build quality and reliability. Maybe you could save a few pounds by buying piecemeal but you'll lose out on the overall package. As far as the dealers are concerned, they believe that taking care of their customers properly is a nicer way of doing business than just handing over boxes.

system?..

...Ask the experts



OUR TOP 20 UK SPECIALIST AV DEALERS

SOUTH

Ashford, Kent SOUNDRAFT HI-FI

40 High Street. 01233 624441

Chelmsford RAYLEIGH HI-FI

216 Moulsham Street. 01245 265245

Colchester RAYLEIGH HI-FI

33 Sir Isaac's Walk. 01206 577682

Kingston-upon-Thames INFIDELITY

9 High Street, Hampton Wick.

020 8943 3530

Maidenhead AUDIO VENUE

36 Queen Street. 01628 633995

Rayleigh, Essex RAYLEIGH HI-FI

44a High Street. 01268 779762

Custom Install Dept.

01268 776932

Southend-on-Sea RAYLEIGH HI-FI

132/4 London Road. 01702 435255

Tunbridge Wells KENT HOME CINEMA

69 London Road, Southborough.

01892 535007

LONDON

N1 GRAHAMS HI-FI

190a New North Road. 020 7226 5500

SW11 ORANGES & LEMONS

61-63 Webbs Road, Battersea.

020 7924 2040

Ealing AUDIO VENUE

27 Bond Street. 020 7924 2040

MIDLANDS

Coventry FRANK HARVEY HI-FI EXCELLENCE

163 Spon Street. 024 7652 5200

Nottingham CASTLE SOUND & VISION

48/50 Maid Marian Way. 0115 9584404

Solihull MUSIC MATTERS

93-95 Hobs Moat Road. 0121 742 0254

NORTH

Chester ACOUSTICA

17 Hoole Road. 01244 344227

York SOUND ORGANISATION

2 Gillygate. 01904 627108

SCOTLAND

Aberdeen HOLBURN HI-FI

441 Holburn Street. 01224 585713/572729

Edinburgh LOUD & CLEAR

Bonnington Mill, 72 Newhaven Rd.

0131 555 3963

Glasgow GLASGOW AUDIO

135 Great Western Road.

0141 332 2200/4707



The majority of the above dealers are members of one or both of the major trade organisations, BADA or CEDIA.

Cooler than ice

Many manufacturers have tried to crack the Media Centre PC market, but **Chris Jenkins** finds the coolest system yet



The HTPC comes with no shortage of control options

All Media Centre home cinema PCs have to satisfy in two areas – looks and performance. Home cinema users want performance comparable to a good Blu-ray player, but wouldn't be happy with a system in their living room which looks like a games-player's acid nightmare. So Cryo has taken its experience in the games PC market, and applied it to a home cinema design, the Cryo HTPC.

Like most manufacturers in this field, Cryo suggests a basic system for each application, but makes it possible to customise the system according to needs and cost. Prices start at around £1,000 and go up to over £5,000 – the setup I'm reviewing here is a mid-range one costing around £2,450.

What all Cryo's HT systems have in common is the recognition that home cinema systems incorporating HD playback are surprisingly demanding of computer power. This necessitates advanced processing and cooling systems that run quietly.

Cryo's Boost technology combines overclocking (the process of running the system's digital clocking faster than the manufacturer intended), tuning of delay timer and buss speeds, and elimination of data bottlenecks. Cryo claims that the 3GHz CPU in this system runs at 4GHz, 33 per cent faster than specified. Careful component selection and enhanced cooling is required to push it this hard, so the 650W power supply unit is accompanied by two 80mm fans drawing air from front to back.

The case hardware itself is rather plain, an Origen design finished in brushed aluminium with a rather perfunctory Cryo sticker applied. The most distinctive feature is a 7in LCD touchpanel. By connecting a VGA loop-through, this can act as a touch-controller and supplementary monitor, so you don't have to switch on your main monitor and AV amp to use the PC. The Windows 7 version of ArcSoft's Total Media Theatre software means you can now view a Blu-ray on an external monitor and the touchscreen at the same time – something not possible with Vista.

An external 10in version is also available, which can be sited in another location.

A flap with a push-latch covers the Cryo's disc tray, multiple format memory card slots and front USB sockets. Unfortunately, the latch



doesn't open automatically when you try to eject the disc tray – an elementary design mistake, but there are alternatives available. The rear of the PC is, of course, festooned with sockets and ports.

The operating system is Windows 7, which incorporates the Media Center multimedia software. All the usual Windows functions you would expect are available, including internet access, utility software and games-playing, but this system also includes DVD/BD playback, a digital/analogue TV tuner, surround sound processing, mass disc storage and remote control.

Built to rock

Cryo's main unit is around the size and weight of a typical home cinema AVR. The case can take full-length cards, so it would be easy to upgrade if necessary, but the accessories for the Cryo HTPC are carefully chosen for living-room use.

The system has a relatively small footprint, and uses an ATX motherboard. The central processor is a Core 2 Duo E8500, the motherboard is fitted with 4GB of DDR2 memory, and the design incorporates four Seagate 1.5Tb hard drives – one for the system software, three for storage in a RAID array, for a total of 6Tb – giving capacity for **about 3,000 hours of SD video content**. 8Tb of storage is an option.

The graphics card is a low-latency design from Asus, and the soundcard is a Xonar D2X 7.1-channel. The system can be fitted with a Hybrid TV quad-tuner or satellite receiver, and includes a Wi-Fi adapter built into the motherboard.

LG's GGC-H20L Blu-ray/DVD-RW burner will handle Blu-ray, DVD, CD, DVD-Audio and SACD, as well as a multiplicity of digital video and audio formats from disc.

Asus again is responsible for the AV output card, a Xonar HDAV1.3, which has 7.1-channel analogue/digital outputs, and HDMI 1.3. However, it's bafflingly complicated to get video and audio routed to the HDMI socket at the same time – it's

Peek-a-boo: The Cryo's LCD frontpanel acts as a supplementary monitor, if you can't be bothered to use your main display

AV/CV

Product: Home theatre PC with overclocking technology

Positioning: Middle of the range iteration, balancing price and facilities

Peers: MediaPC4U SilverStone Crown CW02 AMD, Media PC MSI Media Live



Air con: The twin fans are vital to keeping the Cryo PC running cool

much easier to use the HDCP-compliant DVI sockets with an HDMI adaptor, and a separate digital audio output.

The built-in TI Burr-Brown DAC is good enough quality for most music playback requirements, but the optical/coaxial sockets can be set to output anything from 48Hz to 192Khz should you wish to use an external DAC.

Our review sample was setup to enter Windows Media Center immediately on booting; WMC is the front-end to a wide range of functions, including disc play; digital playback of audio, video and still image files from the hard drive; TV viewing, recording and playback; and 'net video and audio services.

In lieu of a conventional keyboard and mouse, **you're offered a selection of no fewer than five controllers.** There's an Origen Windows Media Center remote with a conventional cursor-and-keypad layout; a Logitech Mini Bluetooth keyboard, a wireless keyboard/mouse combination about the size of a standard remote control; a Logitech MX Air mouse, which can be used on a desk or in the air as a pointer, and includes media buttons and hand gesture volume control; an Xbox wireless game pad, including force feedback vibration; and finally a mini remote control unit which just controls volume and power.

Unfortunately, I found that some Blu-ray titles disabled mouse cursors, so the AirMouse was useless with them. While some multimedia PCs offer an onscreen virtual cursor to overcome this problem, here you have to swap to the other remote control.

Apart from the Windows 7 software, Cryo's package includes Windows Media Player for audio playback, CyberLink PowerDVD Ultra for DVD/Blu-ray, ArcSoft TotalMedia Theatre, and Spotify software for internet music playback. The Xonar HDAV Center Deluxe utility is used to specify the audio output options.

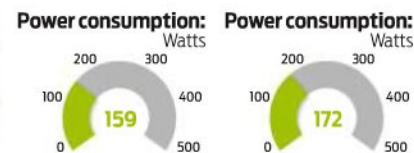
In tests, I had no problems with video playback quality, though our Tech Labs analogue audio jitter results were unspectacular whether from disc or digital, a common problem with PC-based systems. Disc loading speeds aren't spectacular either; Java processing is swift but there's a lot of umming and ahing to get through before you've even reached that stage.

Sophisticated system

Cryo's HTPC is an impressive multimedia system that doesn't make the mistake of trying to supplant your existing multichannel amplification system; it would fit nicely into a hi-fi rack, adding the sophistication of touchpanel control.

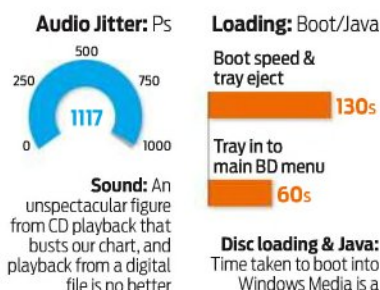
In terms of performance it rivals anything you could expect from a Blu-ray player, and, of course, gives full access to BD-Live functions via your network. But Cryo doesn't seem to have quite grasped all the requirements of the home cinema market; the latching disc-tray lid, the naff Cryo sticker, the fiddly HDMI output, the HDCP-compliance problems and the Blu-ray cursor control are glitches which are bound to irritate most users. They wouldn't take much sorting out, in which case a Cryo HTPC system could take its rightful place among the market leaders.

→ Tech Labs



Idle: Consumes about as much power idling as would a fair-sized amplifier, and more than many 40in TVs

Playing: Moderate increase in power consumption while playing is probably mainly down to the cooling fans



→ Specifications

Motherboard: Micro ATX
CPU: Core 2 Duo E8500
RAM: 4GB Corsair 1066MHz DDR2
Storage: 4x Seagate 1.5Tb hard drives
Graphics card: Asus 9600 GT Silent
Audio card: Asus Xonar D2X 7.1-channel
Tuner: Optional Hybrid TV quad tuner or satellite receiver
WiFi: Yes, built into motherboard
Drive: LG GGC-H20L Blu-ray/DVD-RW burner
Output card: Asus Xonar HDAV1.3
Video formats supported: BD, DVD/-RW, D-Audio, SACD, S/VCD
Audio formats supported: CD/-RW, DTS/HD/Neo6/96.24/ES, Dolby True HD/Digital/Plus/EX/Pro Logic/Virtual Speaker, MPEG-1/-2/-4
Outputs: 2 x DVI; VGA; 4 x USB2; Gigabit Ethernet RJ45; audio 7.1 phono; microphone input; analogue/Freeview coaxial; headphone; multi card reader



HCC VERDICT

Cryo HTPC
 £2,450 Approx

Highs: Good performance; convenient touchscreen

Lows: Some hardware design faults and inconvenient connection implementation

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



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In the Naim of love

Adam Rayner has developed a crush on a very sexy subwoofer



→ Specifications

Drive Unit: 12in long-throw stiffened cone

Enclosure: Sealed – 40mm MDF front, 25mm MDF sides and separate compartment for the amp

Frequency Response: 20Hz-250Hz

On-Board Power: 350W RMS Class AB

Dimensions: 385(w) x 385(h)

x 393(d)mm

Weight: 29.6Kg

Connections: Phono mono and stereo line-level inputs; one stereo set of speaker-level 4mm inputs; RC5 phono in and out for wired remote control (and daisy chain) use; RS232 for custom install controllers; external Earth terminal

Naim is one of very few companies that makes both top-quality electronics respected by us AV geeks and speakers of note beloved by gramophone-owning hi-fi types. Its n-Sub subwoofer is definitely one for home cinema hedz, though.

Made as part of Naim's flagship 5.1 speaker array, the n-Sub comes with a cute and easy-to-understand remote control and a clever set of adjustments. No mic-assisted room-correction system here, but rather a simple menu to access gain, filter frequency and phase invert control and presets with naming. I found it liked to be sat on something firm in acoustic terms, and really wanted to be loaded up to wall, and I messed about with it a good deal. In fact, a real tweaker could fiddle around for ages!

The n-Sub sounds luscious, if a little low on pure might. The bass is rich and accurate, and steers a path through a bizarrely clever set of qualities. For one, it has that distinctively sweet sound of Class AB amplification. Where the Class D thing can be a bit like being smacked by a bare hand, this is velvet-gloved.

It drops deeply, too. Maybe not as astonishingly low as a REL subwoofer, but way deeper than normal music levels, so Naim isn't being poncy or deluded here. This sub is made for purpose.

More importantly, with all that depth comes speed – the n-Sub is rapid to stop when the bass does. Many big, gutty boomers wobble and whoomp for a bit after the explosion.

Looks-wise, it's very pretty, but **its real beauty lies in the comprehensive extras**, which enable you to tuck it out of line of sight, if you want, and to have as many as you need. Indeed, the clever daisy-chain-and-control RC5 system means an extra phono goes from woofer to woofer as well as the passing-through mono signal feed. Also, each woofer in a chain can be 'locked' so as to reduce the chances of messing up your careful settings. This allows for 5.5-channel set ups, all with their own controls. This is cleverer than just about any sub system I have come across.

Yes, there are more powerful subs about, but the n-Sub is so good-looking and good-sounding, I can see real audiophiles adoring it ●

AV/CV

Product:

High-concept hi-fi subwoofer from respected British speaker company

Position:

Part of the Naim 5.1 Home Cinema Suite of n-SATS and n-CENT and aimed squarely at premium buyers

Peers:

Dynaudio Sub 500; Monitor Audio GSW12; REL B1



HCC VERDICT

Naim n-SUB
£1,600 Approx

Highs: Gorgeous rich and textured bass with tight control; clever, innovative features;

Lows: You could get three £500 woofers for the same price; rival subs have a *bit* more grunt

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

KLAB20D

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plus 8 inch architectural wall/ceiling speakers

Code KLAB20DC8

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plus 5 inch moisture water resistant wall ceiling speakers

Code KLAB20MDC5

£179.99

KLAB20D

plus 6.5 inch moisture water resistant wall ceiling speakers

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Easy Icon Universal Remote

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- Macro function; 1 press of a button can switch all devices to the correct setting.

Code EZICON

only £67.52

HD Converter RGB Scart & Component to HDMI 720P

Converts analogue Scart or Component into digital HDMI at a fixed 720P. Great for connecting legacy equipment to an HDMI switchbox for simplifying your connections.

Input signals:

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- NTSC or PAL

Outputs:

- HDMI output fixed 720p
- Audio via 3.5mm jack socket



Code HDUS

only £69.00

Keene IR Distribution Amplifier

- External receiver routes IR signals to internal wands
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- Works with all popular remotes
- Complete system, easy to install and ready to use



Code IRBKITS

only £48.00

Cat5Blaster QC Active

Provides quick and easy 1:1 AV distribution via CAT5 cable. This active model gives excellent picture quality at up to 100m and also provides Infra Red control.

- Send s-video or composite video plus stereo audio over low cost CAT5 cable
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- Active circuitry maintains signal quality up to 100m
- Simple to set up
- Robust reliable design - thousands in daily use. Euro models and passive models also available, please see website



Code C5QCA

only £99.99

GIGAVIDEO 800 Wireless HDMI Sender

At last, a cable free solution for HDMI. Any of the four HD inputs (2 x component and 2 x HDMI) can be sent wirelessly up to 20m to the receiver. The signal is uncompressed and remains up to and including 1080p. IR feedback gives you source control from the viewing area.

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Code GV800

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Code KIRA

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Code KIRAM

Additional Module

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Stream a little stream

Martin Pipe gets his media files up on the bigscreen TV

This compact media player resembles one of Netgear's popular routers. It connects to one of these via Ethernet, and to your TV via HDMI. The EVA2000 then allows you to view content stored on your network or USB devices, and among the formats claimed to be supported are Matroska, MPEG-1/-2/-4, DivX/XviD, JPEG, Dolby Digital, WMV, MOV, FLV, MP3, WMA, WAV and M4A. Not enough? An impressive quantity of online content is also accessible.

Highs

- The 'VuNow' service provides access to many worldwide broadcast channels (including BBC/ITV/C4/five). Pictures and sound from the UK channels are quite good, but Freeview simulcasts are noticeably superior.
- Thanks to UPnP/DLNA, the EVA2000 will play your own media if it's stored on NAS boxes equipped



with a media server or PCs running software like Windows Media Player 11 and Twonky.

- MP3, MPEG-1/-2, JPEG and standard-def DivX all work fine. Depending on the source, AV quality can be excellent.

Lows

- Net radio isn't catered for, nor is integral wireless support – Wi-Fi is available via an optional 'dongle'.
- HDMI output is limited to 720p.
- There's a keyword search, but it only works for online content, not your own files.
- Content lists are slow to access and aren't cyclical – reaching the bottom of the list doesn't

automatically 'loop' back to the top. You'd better organise your stuff well, buddy!

- Files with incompatible extensions don't show up in the content lists, and despite the claimed support for H.264 Matroska, .mkv files meeting this spec didn't appear. None of the hi-def content I tried (for example, 1280x720p DivX) would play. So it's upscaling only, folks.

Black beauty:
Netgear's EVA2000 is more chic than geek

HCC VERDICT

Netgear EVA2000 Digital Entertainer Live
£100 Approx

Overall: **1 2 3 4 5**

POLK SURROUNDBAR SDA IHT → £650 Approx → www.polkaudio.com

Superior soundbar

Polk's product is plug 'n' play perfection, says **Chris Jenkins**

Polk's 'Instant Home Theater' speaker combo is yet another attempt to add oomph to the weedy audio output of most flatscreen TVs. It consists of a soundbar to mount under the screen and a powered subwoofer that can go anywhere you like, because it connects to the soundbar wirelessly.

The advantage of the Polk system over some of its rivals is that it learns to respond to commands from your television's own remote control, so you don't need an extra handset, and it involves only one cable, a stereo phono. Okay, the system doesn't offer true rear surround functions, but this is

more about achieving power than full cinema subtlety.

Highs

- The Polk SurroundBar is ridiculously easy to set up – 'Instant Theater' almost – and if you don't want to wall mount, it can be stood on little cradles. It's stylish and discrete, too, and doesn't clutter your room with extra wires or remotes.
- The 6.5in, 130W subwoofer delivers a lot of bass oomph, with the six-driver SoundBar contributing a full mid-range, and clear treble.

Lows

- Don't expect this system to give you a true surround effect. Polk's SDA (Stereo Dimensional Array) tech certainly does a fair job of filling a room, wrapping sound around the listener from the top and the sides, but this only really works if you're sitting in the 'sweet spot'. Even then it's no more convincing than other psycho-acoustic FX.
- You could get a budget amp and full 5.1 speaker system for the same outlay – but, then, you couldn't set that up in five minutes...



Easy: Polk's SDA IHT is a one-cable audio solution

HCC VERDICT

Polk SurroundBar SDA IHT
£650 Approx

Overall: **1 2 3 4 5**

In Brief

Terminator
Skull Micro Heli
Bladez
£30 Approx



This flimsy micro-helicopter in the shape of a Terminator T-800 skull with its LED eyes and rotating blades looks cool, but is tricky to fly. Still, once mastered, get a friend to invest in one and you can shoot each other out of the sky with invisible beams! Range is about 10 metres, with a flight time of eight minutes from a single charge of the Lithium-ion battery.

1 2 3 4 5

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LCD & PLASMA SCREENS



Philips 42PL9664 LCD TV

This new model features built-in Wi-Fi web access, full HD, 200Hz motion smoothing and with a cutting edge 1ms response time. Native contrast is 80,000:1, although the new Ambilight Spectra 2 rear-projecting coloured LEDs are claimed to give a further 'perceived' improvement in contrast. And at only 49mm thick, the 9664 is easily wall-mountable.



ALSO AVAILABLE 47PFL7404 LCD TV

Samsung 6000 • 7000 • 8000 Series

Samsung's 2009 range includes both full 1080p LCD/LED models including the award-winning UE46B8000.



Panasonic VIERA TX-L37S10

Award-winning 37" LCD TV. Other screen sizes and ranges available including Plasma, Freesat and Wireless-HD models.

ALSO AVAILABLE TX-P42G10 Plasma TV

DLP PROJECTORS

Sim2 Domino D60

Designed to bring outstanding quality to a budget-conscious home cinema enthusiast. The projector features full HD (1920 x 1080) resolution and a 10000:1 contrast ratio.



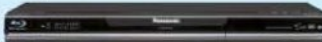
Optoma HD20 • HD82

These new full HD DLP projectors from Optoma combine great performance with outstanding value for money.

BLU-RAY DISC PLAYERS

Panasonic DMP-BD60 & 80

These new players from Panasonic blend comprehensive features with top-drawer picture and sound quality.



Sony BDP-S360 • S560 • S760 • S5000ES

Outstanding range of players from Sony.



Denon DVD-2500BT BLU-RAY TRANSPORT

For faithful transmission of Full HD video and HD audio signals bringing out the full quality of film.



Pioneer BDP-320 • BDP-LX52

Enjoy Blu-ray disc as it should be: Pioneer's BD-Live players deliver high-end picture quality.



HOME CINEMA RECEIVERS

Denon AVR-1910

Denon's new AVR-1910 A/V receiver delivers a hugely entertaining sound and represents outstanding value.



Yamaha

Yamaha's new 2009 range includes five new A/V receivers, a home cinema soundbar, and two TV stands with built-in surround sound.



Sony STR-DA5400ES • STR-DH800

These two award-winning A/V receivers from Sony deliver exceptional performance. Pictured STR-DA5400ES.



Onkyo

Onkyo raises the bar once again in the competitive world of home cinema with its TX-SR607 which features Dolby ProLogic IIz support.



Denon AVR-2310

This award-winning A/V receiver combines fine specification, solid build with breathtaking low-level dynamics and detail.



Pioneer SC-LX82

Bringing studio quality sound to your living room. Pioneer's goal is for you to experience film and music just as the creators intended.

HI-FI SEPARATES

Pro-Ject Genie MKIII

Replacing the Genie 2, the MKIII version includes a new motor, more stable motor base and a new tone arm with traditional anti-skate. Supplied with an OM3e Ortofon cartridge fitted, the Genie MKIII is available in Standard Black with White, Piano Black and Red finish options available at extra cost.



Marantz CD/PM6003

This new CD and amplifier pairing continues Marantz's tradition of building superb budget products.



Arcam FMJ Series

Combining sleek design, flexible connectivity and a level of reproduction far beyond that of budget separates.



Leema Antila II CD Player & Tucana II Amplifier

With stunning sound quality and captivating good looks the new Antila II CD player features unique MD2 active differential multi-DAC converter technology.

The dual mono designed Tucana II uses three heavy-duty toroidal power transformers, has a refined bi-polar output stage and is capable of swinging over forty five amps of current for precise control of the speakers.

Cyrus

Following the remarkable 'Servo Evolution' CD players, Cyrus has introduced a range of amplifiers featuring circuitry developed for its DAC XP. The 8 XP d and Pre XP d include digital inputs - ideal for playing music stored on your computer - while the entry model, 6 XP, is based on the 8 XP but without the digital option. All also include two-zone multiroom capability.



The award-winning 'Servo Evolution' CD players - CD6 SE, CD8 SE & CDX SE/DAC X



Roksan Kandy K2

Roksan replaces its hugely successful Kandy series with the Kandy K2 amplifier and matching CD player.



HI-FI & HOME CINEMA SPEAKERS

Monitor Audio Silver RX6 AV12

Using techniques and materials from the Platinum and Gold ranges, the Silver RX series of slimline hi-fi and home cinema speakers are available in a choice of real wood veneers and high-gloss piano finishes to complement any room. Also Available: Radius R90HD10



Spendor A5 and A6

The A5 offers exceptional performance in relation to its compact dimensions. New drive units ensure clear and natural mid-range and beautifully open treble. The A6 utilises technology developed whilst developing the ST loudspeaker with its asymmetrically sculptured tweeter faceplate and refined 18cm bass/mid driver.



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B&W MT-25

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With 40-42in TVs set to be one of the hottest AV properties in the post-Christmas sales, we got **John Archer** to throw five of the more affordable models around into the Home Cinema Choice rumble pit

THE CONTENDERS

NEW JVC LT-42DV1

£950 Approx

NEW LG 42PQ6000

£580 Approx

NEW PANASONIC TX-P42S10

£750 Approx

NEW SAMSUNG LE-40B550

£680 Approx

NEW TOSHIBA 42RV635

£650 Approx

THE TEST

The five TVs in this group test were reviewed under two distinct but equally important conditions. First, they were assessed in a carefully created living room environment, using the same low ambient light levels for each TV. During this period, pictures were calibrated, but only using a tool that's affordable and readily available to any of our readers: the *HD Video Essentials* Blu-ray.

Each TV was also tested using exactly the same sequences from the same Blu-rays and DVDs. In fact, we also used pre-recorded broadcasts from a Sky+ box to test standard-definition performance for the most part – though obviously we couldn't use exactly the same footage when testing each TV's tuner.

Test material consisted of a number of Blu-ray film sequences, most notably from *Monsters vs Aliens* and the disc we'll refer to the most, *Braveheart*. For standard-def, we used Sky News and a DVD platter of *Seabiscuit*.

The other key part of our testing procedure is to put them all through their paces in our state-of-the-art labs, using industry-respected measuring and metering equipment, so that we can supply you with some objective numbers alongside the key subjective results.

While HCC occasionally dabbles with the smaller things in televisual life, we strongly believe that TV only really begins at 40in. It's when you reach this level – or larger – that you've really got a screen capable of a) getting the best from hi-def and b) giving you a cinematic experience.

However, a 40-42in TV is a considerable expense, especially in these cash-strapped times, and it will probably be a very dominant addition to your living room. So naturally you want to know that your money will be well-spent on something that'll grace your living room with dazzling pictures and a cute design. That's why we've put together this test of affordable 40-42in models from five of the AV world's biggest names.

The picture desk

As a TV's picture quality is its single most important feature, it makes sense to kick-off this bigscreen battle by looking at how the different

models handle visuals, beginning with the excellent transfer on the recent *Braveheart* Blu-ray release.

The first thing I'll say is that none of these screens produce bad picture quality. Indeed, occasionally they excel – it's just that some excel more obviously and regularly than others.

I have a special place in my heart for a solid black level response. It's the foundation on which other good things can grow. And it's the area that arguably most sorts the men from the boys in this grouptest.

There are a number of dark sequences in *Braveheart* with which you can test a screen's ability to produce a convincing black level, and the two I chose are a young William Wallace following his father into a darkened hut filled with people (Chapter 1, 3.34), and an older William's army battering at the gates of York at night (Chapter 12, 1.38.18).

As you may have predicted, it's a couple of the LCD entrants that struggle the most with these scenes. The most disappointing panel

without doubt is JVC's 42DV1, which completely fails to live up to its 1,000,000:1 contrast ratio claim. The darkest parts of the picture appear through a gentle pall of grey mist – a problem which worsens if you view the TV from even a slight angle.

Black levels improve with the set's dynamic contrast option activated, but this also introduces distractingly obvious jumps in brightness levels.

The other set that disappoints with blacks is Toshiba's 42RV635. The amount of greyness seeping in isn't as excessive as it is with the JVC, as long as you rein in the set's backlight and brightness settings, but again the viewing angle is quite severely limited.

LG's 42PQ6000, with its plasma rather than LCD panel, isn't immune to black level issues, either. There's more greyness around than is usual with plasma technology, in my opinion, and subtle details of the distant night-time battlefield during the York sequence are crushed out of the picture. It also doesn't help that

JVC LT-42DV1BJ → £950 Approx → www.jvc.co.uk



In brief

As you'd expect of a TV that sits quite high up JVC's current TV tree, the 42DV1 has quite a bit 'going on'. For starters, it's 30mm deep at its edges, making it the thinnest TV in this roundup by some margin. The relatively high £950 price is somewhat justified by the amount of picture processing it carries – in particular, its 100Hz engine,

dedicated 24p Blu-ray mode, and DynaPix HD engine. This latter system, proprietary to JVC, works on multiple picture elements, including colour and contrast, and scales standard-definition sources.

The 42DV1 also claims a startling 1,000,000:1 contrast ratio, can play MP3s and JPEGs via a provided USB port, and, um, can be operated by clapping your hands.

Deceptively skinny: While the 42DV1 is very slim at the edges, it suddenly bulks out to 69mm over a central portion

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



White screen: Eco mode reduces this JVC's quite high consumption by a relatively small 30W

Test footage: Movie footage with full volume demonstrates the speakers are using lots of power, but the result is mostly terrible distortion

Contrast: ratio



Picture: The JVC's contrast ratio didn't reach anywhere near the claimed figure even in Bright mode, however luminance was a high-reaching 68.64fl in standard mode

Colour temp: Kelvin



Presets: A small selection of CT presets includes one which is very accurate – lucky as there are no manual R/G/B tweaks
Normal: 8,277K
Cool: 8,284K
Warm: 6,533K

the screen suffers with image retention, where bright elements appearing against a mostly dark backdrop can leave ghostly shadows of themselves hanging around for a good few seconds.

My two favourite screens during dark scenes are, predictably, Panasonic's plasma contender, and less predictably, Samsung's 40B550.

Panasonic's Real Black Drive tech has long delivered the best black levels in the TV world outside of Pioneer's now-defunct Kuro plasmas, and this holds true even on a low-end screen like the P42S10. During the HD *Braveheart* sequences, a truly natural black tone combines effortlessly with shadow detail galore.

With the Samsung the situation is more complicated. Its black colour isn't quite as profoundly deep as that of the LG 42PQ6000, never mind the Panasonic P42S10. But it looks more neutral in tone than LG's, and produces greater shadow detail.

The 40B550's black levels are enhanced, too, by the picture's overall

dynamism; dark picture elements are thrown into eye-catching relief by their existence alongside exceptionally bright, pure whites and some dazzlingly vivid colours.

Braveheart's Falkirk battle scene is another good demo sequence, this time for assessing a TV's brightness. Here, Samsung's LCD displays the sun-drenched battlefield with dazzling intensity. Swords, shields and helmets sparkle, yet without the picture looking bitty.

JVC's 42DV1 proves a first-rate performer with this scene, too. Freed from the need to show a convincing black, it drives the daytime carnage out with real venom. Yet the other LCD contender, Toshiba's 42RV635, underwhelms in this area. After I'd tweaked its pictures to elicit a decent black level response, they looked unusually muted. So, if your TV sits in a mostly bright room, or in direct sunlight, the 42RV635 is definitely not the TV for you.

Elsewhere, LG's 42PQ6000 is quite bright for a plasma TV, while

the Panasonic's pictures give the impression of dynamism because of the excellent black level response underpinning everything.

The colour performance of these five flatscreens is again a mixed bag, with the Panasonic, JVC and Samsung models leading the way.

Samsung's 40B550 and JVC's 42DV1 are the most instantly attractive, pushing colours out with an attention-grabbing vibrancy that seldom errs into cartoonish territory.

Panasonic's P42S10 isn't as overt with its colour charms, yet with HD footage, it displays an uncanny ability to reproduce subtle tonal shifts, minute colour blends and a expansive range. The only pity is that the P42S10's colours slide a little with standard-def sources, falling prey to plasma technology's bias toward green and orange tones.

The weakest screen with colour, for me, is the LG 42PQ6000 – especially if you stick with its mostly poor presets. But even after careful calibration I frequently spotted the

LG 42PQ6000 → £580 Approx → www.lge.co.uk



In brief

Despite its eye-catching price, the 42PQ6000 is certainly not some no-frills entry-level bit of fluff.

It plays the Hz number game perfectly, for instance, claiming a 600Hz frame rate achieved by sub-frame interpolation. The plasma technology, meanwhile, purportedly helps it to deliver a quoted contrast ratio of 2,000,000:1, and it carries

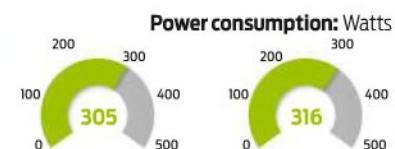
LG's proprietary XD Engine video processing. The USB input will handle standard-def DivX video as well as MP3 and JPEG files.

With a slinky single-layer bezel making it look much more expensive than it is, the only on-paper area of concern, really, is the 42PQ6000's 1024 x 768 native resolution, which falls short of the Full HD resolution of its megatest rivals.

HD by half:

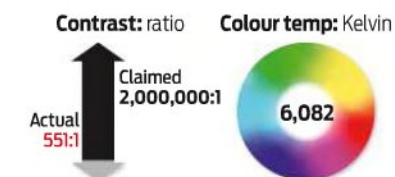
LG's 42in plasma features a rather old-school 1024 x 768 pixel resolution

→ Tech Labs



White screen:
High for a 42in screen, even for a plasma; Intelligent Sensor reduces consumption by over 50% in a darkened room

Test footage:
In full flow the LG's consumption only increases by 10W. The extra juice drawn by the speakers is counterbalanced by not running the screen at full brightness



Picture: Real world contrast is 517:1 in Standard mode, or 551:1 in Vivid mode; surely the 2,000,000:1 claim on the website can't be accurate? Luminance is 24.45fl in Vivid mode – typical for a plasma

Presets:
Only three CT presets, none particularly accurate; but Expert mode offers manual R/G/B gain and offset for perfect calibration
Medium: 8,904K
Warm: 6,082K
Cool: 10,669K

same green/orange overload issue mentioned with the Panasonic, together with some iffy whites, and a generally slightly washed out look.

This leaves the Toshiba, which turns in a solid effort – accurate flesh tones and good consistency across the colour palette as a whole. Only the lack of vibrancy caused by the screen's brightness shortage counts against it, really.

Moving on to HD sharpness, there's a tussle for the top between Samsung's 40B550 and JVC's 42DV1. **Both prove capable of rendering pure HD detail with absolute precision**, leaving *Braveheart's* detailed battle sequences looking so good you want to step through the screen and join in. Notwithstanding all the flying limbs and heads, naturally. The JVC just edges it in the clarity stakes by virtue of its 100Hz engine, though the Samsung suffers surprisingly little with motion blur considering it doesn't have any extra Hz processing going on.

The Panasonic does a sturdy job of reproducing HD detail and clarity levels, though its slight lack of dynamism versus the JVC and Samsung models means that its clarity is expressed more subtly.

Even the LG 42PQ6000 makes HD pictures look sharp, despite only having an HD Ready screen, leaving the Toshiba 42RV635 as the only slightly weak HD link. Its hi-def pictures certainly look vastly superior to standard definition, but don't enjoy as much 'snap'.

Setting the standard

The Tosh's lack of hi-def ping is ironic when you consider it delivers some of the sharpest standard-definition performances in this group test. So clever is the Resolution+ system at upscaling standard-def (provided you only use the number 1, 2 or 3 settings) that only the DynaPix system on JVC's much more expensive 42DV1 can better it.

Both the Panasonic P42S10 and Samsung's 40B550 are tidy

standard-def performers too, with the latter benefitting from a new and much-improved upscaling chipset.

The LG 42PQ6000 left me feeling letdown with SD. It tends to exaggerate source noise, and its innate colour flaws simply get more exaggerated the lower down the source-quality ladder you slide.

The penultimate big point to consider across our five TV hopefuls is motion reproduction. Common sense would suggest that the two plasma models are the winners here, thanks to their negligible response

PERFORMANCE

Round-up: Of the five screens, Samsung's 40B550 delivers on the most fronts, with a picture that's remarkably solid for such an affordable LCD TV. It's a shame its audio is weak, though. People with viewing angle issues could consider the Panasonic P42S10 instead

JVC LT-42DV1: 1 2 3 4 5

LG 42PQ6000: 1 2 3 4 5

Panasonic TX-P42S10: 1 2 3 4 5

Samsung LE40B550: 1 2 3 4 5

Toshiba 42RV635: 1 2 3 4 5

PANASONIC TX-P42S10 → £750 Approx → www.panasonic.co.uk



In brief

Panasonic's P42S10 plasma doesn't have one of the brand's built-in Freesat tuners, nor the brighter but more eco-friendly 'NeoPDP' panels. However, neither of these issues should prevent it from being a fine picture performer, and it has some strengths up its sleeve, too, not least its Full HD resolution – a real rarity in the 42in plasma world – and

a claimed contrast ratio of 2,000,000:1 that humbles the efforts of our LCD contenders.

The P42S10 also plays the Hz game, claiming 400Hz using similar sub-field technology to that noted on the LG 42PQ6000, and its multimedia talents are up to speed in that it can play AVCHD video and JPEG photos via the built-in SD card slot. No USB, though.

Smooth:

This Panasonic adds 400Hz frame interpolation tech to its relevant facts and figures

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



White screen:

Consumption with our 100IRE white test is high, showing how hard the Panasonic has to be driven to get real brightness; Eco mode cuts it to 222W in a darkened room

Test footage:

Power consumption drops considerably with live movie footage at full volume

Contrast: ratio



Colour temp: Kelvin



Picture:

Dynamic picture contrast is impressive despite failing to match the claimed figure. You're more likely to use Standard mode anyway, which measured a reasonable 7,492:1, with a luminance of 21.81fl

Presets:

This Panasonic has a small range of not particularly accurate CT presets, and no manual control over R/G/B levels

Normal: 7,137K
Warm: 6,154K
Cool: 8,295K

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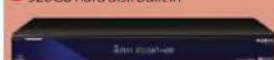
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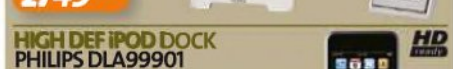
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times. But things aren't quite that clear cut, at least where the LG 42PQ6000 is concerned. Despite its 600Hz system, motion suffers marked judder during *Braveheart*'s fast camera pans and tracking shots. The 400Hz engine in Panasonic's P42S10 works a little better, reducing judder to a less noticeable level.

The LCD models have a tendency to lose resolution when showing moving objects, but none of them leave pictures looking severely smeary. Even the weakest screen in this regard, the Toshiba, is still perfectly watchable, even with sports footage.

The final image point to touch upon briefly is viewing angle. I've already hinted that the JVC and Toshiba models dramatically lose contrast – and colour saturation – if watched from any significant off-axis angle, but I haven't stressed that the two plasma models can be watched from almost right angles before their pictures significantly break down. So, if your living room requires you to watch TV from a distinct angle, the

plasma screens could be your best options, almost by default.

Pictures are only one part of a TV's performance. They also have to produce sound – and this is often a bit of a problem for flatscreen TVs.

As it happens, though, with one exception, the sets here don't fare too badly. That exception is the Samsung 40B5500, which continues the brand's trend for weedy, thin sonics with some aplomb. The next worst audio contender is the Toshiba, which manages a bit more dynamic range and raw power than its Samsung rival, but is still found wanting during *Braveheart*'s raucous set pieces.

The other three models are, for me, much of a muchness, all managing to sound well-rounded, open and reasonably clear without ever blowing my socks off.

Design

So, which of these tellies is the most attractive to look at, even when it's off? Well, on paper, JVC's 'Super Slim' 42DVI should probably

runaway with this category, thanks to its sexy 30mm depth, thin bezel and glinting-metal stand. However, the 42DVI suddenly juts out to around 70mm in its central third, making the brand's Super Slim claim feel a bit disingenuous, especially when rival companies are doing TVs less than 30mm deep all the way across. So, it's actually the two Korean brands, LG and Samsung that give us the best-looking TVs in this roundup. The Samsung's extra curves and glamorous see-through extremities make it my personal favourite, but the LG's glossy, single-plane antics aren't far behind. ➤

DESIGN

Round-up: The LG and Samsung models clearly have more design flair than their Japanese counterparts, although JVC's slinky screen has its charms

JVC LT-42DVI: 1 2 3 4 5

LG 42PQ6000: 1 2 3 4 5

Panasonic TX-P42S10: 1 2 3 4 5

Samsung LE40B550: 1 2 3 4 5

Toshiba 42RV635: 1 2 3 4 5

SAMSUNG LE40B550 → £680 Approx → www.samsung.co.uk



In brief

This 40in LCD TV features Samsung's iconic 'Crystal Design', giving it immediate shelf appeal and making it look classy and expensive. It's well connected too, with four HDMI and a JPEG/MP3-capable USB among its offerings. It also packs Samsung's decent (yet not particularly special) Digital Natural Image engine video processing

system. However, its lack of 100Hz – or any number of Hz! – processing is a bit odd given how common this feature is on the other TVs in this group test, and there's no trace of the Ethernet port sported by Samsung's B650 range for accessing PC files or Samsung's online services. Oh, and don't forget, it's a whole two inches smaller than our other four contenders...

Cheap and tasty: It's no longer new, but Samsung's Crystal Design aesthetic still helps the 40B550 become one of the prettiest 40in TVs around

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



White screen:
Average for a screen of this size; Dynamic mode ups the consumption to 190W

Test footage:
Running with a movie at full volume, the Samsung doesn't draw a lot of juice

Contrast: ratio



Picture: Unremarkable contrast ratio in Standard mode (2,898:1), a more impressive 5,969:1 in the unwatchable Dynamic mode, with reasonable luminance of 54.64fl

Colour temp: Kelvin



Presets:
A fair range of colour presets and full R/G/B/gain and offset parameters for perfect adjustment.
Cool: 11,840K
Normal: 9,915K
Warm 1: 8,017K
Warm 2: 6,674K
Warm 3: 5,772K

The plasticky Toshiba 42RV635 doesn't do anything particularly fancy aside from a love it-or-hate it luminous logo, while Panasonic's P42S10 is just another in a long line of almost willfully uninteresting TV designs from the brand. Time for the Japanese giant to call Trinny and Susannah, perhaps?

Features

Again, this is a category in which I expected JVC's 42DV1 to come out on top. Call me stupid, but I equated that £950 price tag with some standout features. However, unless you count its slenderness as a particularly massive feature – I don't – its main standout point is the adoption of 100Hz processing (something that the other LCD screens lack), although the differences in motion quality this brings to the table appear quite marginal. Otherwise, points of interest are restricted to its hardly unique ability to play MP3 or JPEG files from USB drives, and, um, its

HandClap function. For yes, **in a development that will surely shake the AV world to its foundations** (not), the 42DV1 lets you operate three very basic functions by clapping your hands a specific number of times. For god's sake, don't tell the kids...

Both the plasma contenders are chiefly distinguished on the feature front by their frame interpolation shenanigans, which create a 400Hz effect on the Panasonic P42S10 and a 600Hz 'effect' on the LG 42PQ6000. As I said earlier, these systems are a bit of a fudge

FEATURES

Round-up: There's little to separate these five TVs in feature terms. All make some effort to cater for multimedia files, and boast similar connections. The Samsung is the least frilly of the bunch

JVC LT-42DV1: 1 2 3 4 5

LG 42PQ6000: 1 2 3 4 5

Panasonic TX-P42S10: 1 2 3 4 5

Samsung LE40B550: 1 2 3 4 5

Toshiba 42RV635: 1 2 3 4 5

– the screens don't actually refresh themselves 400 or 600 times a second – but they do improve motion reproduction.

The LG and Panasonic TVs carry multimedia support (including video playback) – the former via USB, the latter via SD card. Note that the LG has enough flexibility with its setup options to have earned official endorsement – and a couple of preset slots – from the independent Imaging Science Foundation (ISF).

Toshiba's 42RV635 also enjoys multimedia support via USB, though this is restricted to JPEG photos. This TV's main claim to fame has to be its Resolution+ processing.

The least well specified TV is the Samsung 40B550. Aside from a wide colour gamut system, the only things of even slight interest are its chic design and the inclusion among its connections of a JPEG/MP3-capable USB port. Funny, then, that the 40B550 nevertheless produces the all-round best picture quality. Maybe its simplicity is key. ➤

TOSHIBA 42RV635 → £650 Approx → www.toshiba.co.uk



In brief

With Toshiba's AV series flaunting a staggering budget price-tag, and Toshiba's XV and ZV models attracting punters with their 100Hz and 200Hz processing respectively, there's a concern that this mid-to-low end 42RV635 might fall through the cracks.

Its main 'step-up' appeal over the AV635 series, it seems, is an

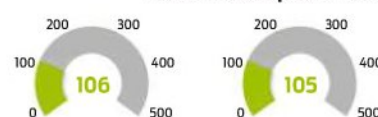
ecological one, with Toshiba claiming that it runs at a lower wattage than your average LCD TV. But the set also offers a markedly higher claimed contrast ratio – 50,000:1 – albeit at the expense of a slightly reduced brightness output. Other key specs, include Toshiba's Active Vision II video processing, Resolution+ scaling system, four HDMI inputs and JPEG playback via USB.

When standard-def goes good:

Borrowing tech created for Toshiba's Cell PC processors, Resolution+ proves excellent at upscaling SD

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



White screen:

Low power use for a set this size, and Auto Brightness Sensor cuts it to a tiny 52W in dim lighting

Test footage:

Little change in movie playback – Toshiba's ecological claims have some weight

Contrast: ratio



Picture: Dynamic contrast ratio measures at only 1,506:1 and standard at 707:1, so the claims of 50,000:1 are hard to support. Luminance in Standard mode is reasonably high at 58.87fl.

Colour temp: Kelvin



Presets:

Toshiba offers a wide range of CT presets plus manual R/G/B offset/gain for perfect adjustment
0: 5,866K
2: 6,630K
6: 8,580K
10: 11,498K

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Final standings

Plasma can no longer be counted on to romp home ahead of LCD in almost any group test.

But it's still a surprise to find a plasma TV propping up the table. Saying that, LG's 42PQ60000 didn't leave us much of an option but to mark it down against its peers, on account of it suffering from a trio of rather old-school issues: slightly juddery motion handling, image retention, and disappointing black levels. Its colours are none too hot either – especially if you can't be bothered to calibrate them beyond the video presets.

In fourth place is Toshiba's 42RV635. This isn't a bad performer post-calibration considering how affordable it is, but the limited viewing angle is a pain, as is the amount of brightness you have to sacrifice to get a convincing black level response.

JVC's 42DVI comes third. There are times when this screen produces mouthwatering HD images, and its talent with standard-def is also impressive. But an inability to reproduce really convincing dark scenes costs it dear – especially given its elevated price.

Two-way tussle

Panasonic's P42S10 makes a hard play for the top spot, thanks to a scintillating, black-level-heavy HD performance backed up by some decent audio and multimedia capability. Its design is bland, though, and a general lack of brightness is impossible to ignore given that most people's living rooms aren't kept in a perpetual state of semi-darkness. In fact, despite its superiority to most of its rivals today, in some ways the P42S10 simply makes us want to step up to one of Panasonic's brighter NeoPDP panels instead.

You don't have to be Einstein to figure out that our favourite screen of the five is Samsung's 40B5500. Despite previous Samsung successes in group test environments, we were actually quite surprised to see the 40B550 doing so well considering that it's notably lacking in picture processing power. But in the end, despite some rather flimsy audio, its combination of glamorous looks, bold and dynamic pictures and aggressive price tag make it the hardest of these mid-size TVs to resist ●

1ST



HCC VERDICT

Samsung LE40B550
£680 Approx

Highs: Gorgeous looks; excellent connectivity; dynamic and crisp pictures; good value

Lows: Slightly limited viewing angle; no 100Hz processing; poor audio

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

HD Ready: yes including 1080p/24

Progressive scan: yes NTSC and PAL formats both work

Digital TV tuner: yes plus subscription CI slot

Composite video: yes one input

S-Video: yes one 4-pin

Scart: yes two (both RGB)

Component video: yes one input

HDMI: yes four v1.3 HDMI

PC input: yes one VGA input

Headphone: yes one output

Sound: Nicam stereo

Resolution: 1920 x 1080

Brightness: 500cd/m2; Contrast ratio: 'High', apparently!

Dimensions (on stand): 998(w) x 699(h) x 255(d)mm

Weight: 19.4kg

Other features: DNLe processing, Edge enhancement processing, wide colour gamut setting, USB port for JPEG/MP3 playback

2ND



HCC VERDICT

Panasonic TX-P42S10
£750 Approx

Highs: Good HD playback; best black levels in this group test; Full HD res is unusual on an affordable 42in PDP

Lows: SD pictures are soft; lack of brightness; bland design

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

HD Ready: yes including 1080p/24

Progressive scan: yes NTSC and PAL formats both work

Digital TV tuner: yes plus subscription CI slot

Composite video: yes one input

S-Video: yes one 4-pin

Scart: yes two (both RGB)

Component video: yes one input

HDMI: yes four v1.3 HDMI

PC input: yes one VGA input

Headphone: yes one output

Sound: Nicam stereo

Resolution: 1920 x 1080

Brightness: N/A

Contrast ratio: 2,000,000:1 (dynamic)

Dimensions (on stand): 1,029(w) x 704(h) x 334(d)mm

Weight: 27kg

Other features: 400Hz, Intelligent Frame Creation, SD card slot with JPEG and AVCHD movie support, V-Real 4 processing



Watching HD on a suitably large flatscreen is an eye-opening experience

3RD



HCC VERDICT

JVC LT-42DV1
£950 Approx

Highs: Pictures are sharp, bright and colourful; tidy, kind-of-slim design; decent sonics

Lows: Black level issues; very limited viewing angle

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

HD Ready: yes including 1080p/24

Progressive scan: yes NTSC and PAL formats both work

Digital TV tuner: yes plus subscription CI slot

Composite video: yes one input

S-Video: no via Scart only

Scart: yes two (one RGB)

Component video: yes one input

HDMI: yes three v1.3 HDMI

PC input: yes one VGA input

Headphone: yes one output

Sound: Nicam stereo

Resolution: 1920 x 1080

Brightness: 500cd/m2

Contrast ratio: 1,000,000:1 (dynamic)

Dimensions (off stand): 985.2(w) x 675.2(h) x 69(d)mm

Weight: 16.5kg

Other features: DynaPix HD processing, 100Hz processing, USB for MP3 and JPEG playback, HandClap control system, SuperSlim design

4TH



HCC VERDICT

Toshiba 42RV635
£650 Approx

Highs: Flexible picture setup; decent picture quality post-calibration; excellent standard-def upscaling

Lows: Calibration reduces brightness; motion blur; poor viewing angle

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

HD Ready: yes including 1080p/24

Progressive scan: yes NTSC and PAL formats both work

Digital TV tuner: yes plus subscription CI slot

Composite video: yes one input

S-Video: yes one four-pin

Scart: yes two (one RGB)

Component video: yes one input

HDMI: yes four v1.3 HDMI

PC input: yes one VGA input

Headphone: yes one output

Sound: Nicam stereo

Resolution: 1920 x 1080

Brightness: 450cd/m2

Contrast ratio: 50,000:1

Dimensions (off stand): 1,009(w) x 649(h) x 94(d)mm

Weight: 19.7kg

Other features: MetaBrain processing including Resolution+ and Active Vision LCD II, USBs for playback of JPEGs, colour management system, 'eco' panel design

5TH



HCC VERDICT

LG 42PQ6000
£580 Approx

Highs: Attractive design; good feature count for the money; quite bright by plasma standards

Lows: Pictures need heavy calibration; only HD Ready

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

HD Ready: yes but not Full HD

Progressive scan: yes NTSC and PAL formats both work

Digital TV tuner: yes plus subscription CI slot

Composite video: yes one input

S-Video: yes one four-pin

Scart: yes two (one RGB)

Component video: yes one input

HDMI: yes three v1.3 HDMI

PC input: yes one VGA input

Headphone: no none included

Sound: Nicam stereo

Resolution: 1024 x 768

Brightness: 1500cd/m2

Contrast ratio: 2,000,000:1 (dynamic)

Dimensions (off stand): 1,040.8(w) x 669.2(h) x 76.8(d)mm

Weight: 23.3kg

Other features: XD Engine processing, 600Hz processing, USB for MP3/DivX standard def/JPEG playback, one-layer design, ISF calibration support, wide colour gamut option

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PLAYBACK

→ **Software highlights** **STAR TREK** Sci-fi spectacular delivers AV thrills
TERMINATOR SALVATION John Connor battles in Blu **THE HURT LOCKER** Nail-biting Gulf War thriller
GI JOE: RISE OF THE COBRA The 80s toy sensation is back! **MONSTERS VS ALIENS** One for the kids
SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS Disney raids its archive once again **AND MUCH MORE!**



Face off

Terminator: Salvation → Region B BD
 Sony Pictures

Does the latest *Terminator* flick make a killer home cinema experience? Find out on p113

HCC Ratings key

Sneezy	1 2 3 4 5
Breezy	1 2 3 4 5
Wheezy	1 2 3 4 5
Sleazy	1 2 3 4 5
Cheesy	1 2 3 4 5



Warp-speed wonder

The Enterprise crew v2.0 debuts with a brilliant Blu-ray

Star Trek arrives courtesy of über producer/director JJ Abrams with a regained sense of wonder and – most importantly – fun that has been sorely lacking from the sci-fi franchise since the mid-1990s. This big budget re-imagining of the earliest days of Kirk, Spock, McCoy *et al* is popcorn moviemaking at its very best, with excellent performances, breathtaking SFX, epic action and smart sense of humour.

Mark Craven: Paramount's *Star Trek* Blu-ray is a visual treat. Numerous scenes are packed with bright colours, yet it never looks unnatural, and edges are as sharp as Spock's ears. As a film set a lot of the time in outer space, it's good to know that this AVC encode's black levels are deep and true – but not at the expense of peak brightness – and the BD's detail levels allow the intricate high-budget sets to shine. A tasty layer of film grain is present throughout the AVC 2.40:1 picture, but there's no sign of coding issues. Brilliant.

Steve May: *Star Trek*'s 5.1 Dolby TrueHD soundtrack is literally out of this world. Technically sublime and galactic in scale, it beams SF drama wide across the soundstage.

If you want a movie to show off your system, this Blu-ray is a cracker. There's a throbbing LFE

that gives tangible weight to the futuristic spacecraft and punches you back in your seat when planets implode, and for that deeply immersive experience there's plenty of frenetic sound panning. Frequent Abrams-collaborator Michael Giacchino delivers a suitably grand score, although it's often drowned out in the general melee. Long-time fans will dig the liberal inclusion of sonic motifs from *TOS*.

Anton van Beek: Accompanying the movie on Disc One are a BD-Live link to NASA's RSS feed(!) and a fast-paced, info-packed commentary by Abrams, producers Bryan Burk and Damon Lindelof, and writers Alex Kurtzman and Roberto Orci. The real goodies, though, can be found on Disc Two, all presented in 1080p: a 17-minute *Making of...*, plus eight other featurettes exploring specific aspects of the production – Casting, Starships, Aliens, etc. Also included are nine deleted scenes (with optional commentary), a gag-reel, trailers and BD-exclusive CG models of two spacecraft.

The third disc in the pack is a bonus DVD, housing a Windows Media and iTunes-compatible Digital Copy of the film and the *Star Trek: D-A-C* game demo for the Xbox 360.

HCC VERDICT

Star Trek: 3-Disc Digital Copy
Special Edition
Paramount → All-region BD/R2
DVD → £30 Approx

We say: An excellent package for what was easily the best of the year's Summer blockbusters

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



Lost: Complete Fifth Season

Walt Disney → Region B BD
£61 Approx



This sci-fi-infused fifth run of *Lost* is cracking stuff, and easily works best in boxset form, when you don't have to wait a week between episodes. The AVC 1.78:1 encodes look superb, but they're easily matched by the dynamic and immersive DTS-HD MA 5.1 sonics. Extras include chat tracks, featurettes, deleted scenes, D-Box functionality and a handy SeasonPlay modes that saves your spot in an episode when you stop the disc and spools up the next episode, bypassing the menus, when you go onto the next disc. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Family Guy: Something... Dark Side

20th Century Fox → All-region BD
£29 Approx



Family Guy tackles *The Empire Strikes Back* in this second of its of *Star Wars* spoofs. The idea is

starting to wear a bit thin, but there are still plenty of fun gags, including an inspired Cookie Monster cameo. Making the leap to hi-def – but not widescreen – the AVC 1.33:1 1080p picture means the CG spacecraft models look superb. The DTS-HD 5.1 mix isn't as engaging, although the score certainly benefits from the added range. Extras include a chat track and 1080i encode of the film with pop-up trivia. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Sarah Connor Chronicles: Season Two

Warner Home Video → All-region BD
£60 Approx



The final season of the excellent *Terminator* TV spin-off hits Blu-ray with a VC-1 1.78:1

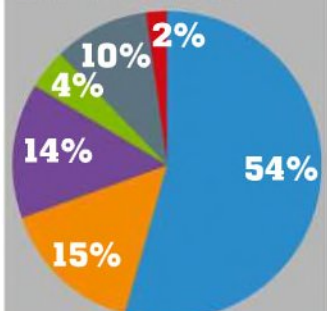
1080p transfer that is noticeably sharper and more detailed than the UK TV transmission. There's also a plentiful supply of extras, including a quartet of episode commentaries, eight featurettes and a Blu-ray-exclusive interactive look at the filming of a key scene. The only downer is Warner's ongoing reluctance to grant TV material lossless audio, saddling this set with plain old Dolby Digital 5.1 audio. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

We asked you...

Which disc would you like most this Christmas?

- Transformers 2
- Star Trek
- G.I. Joe: The Rise of Cobra
- Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince
- The Hangover
- Terminator Salvation



Results of poll from
www.homecinemachoice.com

Robot wars

The Terminator franchise is definitely back

Terminator Salvation is a film that smacks of studio interference and numerous rewrites. Finally giving fans the chance to see the future war against Skynet, the story unfortunately becomes bogged down in a secondary plot about a mysterious stranger with a big secret (can you guess what it is?). What viewers end up with is a series of superb action scenes desperately in search of a coherent plot to pull them all together.

Mark Craven: Pop...*Salvation* into your BD-spinner and you get a torture test for your telly, right from the opening assault sequence where Christian Bale and chums descend into a subterranean base of darkly-lit interiors riddled with smoke and punctuated by torchlight. Tricky stuff, but Sony Picture's 2.40:1 AVC transfer carries it off with ease. When the action returns to the sun-lit battle-torn surface, director McG's purposefully washed-out colour palette (just so you know we're in an uninviting, dystopian future world) might make you tempted to ramp up the colours on your display. Don't – everything is as it should be.

Steve May: *T4* features an unapologetically raucous DTS-HD MA 24/48kHz 5.1 soundtrack, full of unflinching volume and dynamics. The mix is expansive and exciting, the deep bass apocalyptic. Indeed, I found much more in the soundtrack than I recall from a theatrical viewing. There are wonderful textures, and atmospheric use of the LFE to emphasise mood (not just create mayhem) and plenty of wild panning.

When Connor and his team stage their first assault on the Skynet



Christian still had his doubts about laser-eye surgery

R&D facility, you know you're in for a thrilling ride. The landscape is ripped apart by missile attacks and a sonic wave ripples from front-to-back, quickly followed by swooping jets and choppers scything across the front L/C/R. There are delicious concussive thwumps from more artillery and then a helicopter lands on a cyborg's head. The shots emptied into the thing's skull sound deep, sharp and metallic; the LFE tight and brutal. I sense a future demo favourite here....

Anton van Beek: *T4* didn't impress me much, but there's no questioning the quality of the extras. First seen on the US *Watchmen: Director's Cut* BD, Maximum Movie Mode remains as

innovative and impressive as ever, with director McG popping up on screen to provide real-time

analysis of sequences, as well as additional PiP content, storyboards, links to Focus Points featurettes and a Terminator Mythology timeline. The eleven Focus Points can be viewed directly from the Special Features menu, and are joined by two extra featurettes and Sony's usual BD-Live roster (web portal, Cinechat and Movie IQ).



HCC VERDICT

Terminator Salvation: Director's Cut → Sony Pictures Region B BD → £25 Approx

We say: The mediocre sci-fi sequel certainly delivers the hi-def goods with this excellent Blu-ray release

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



Lacking a little depth

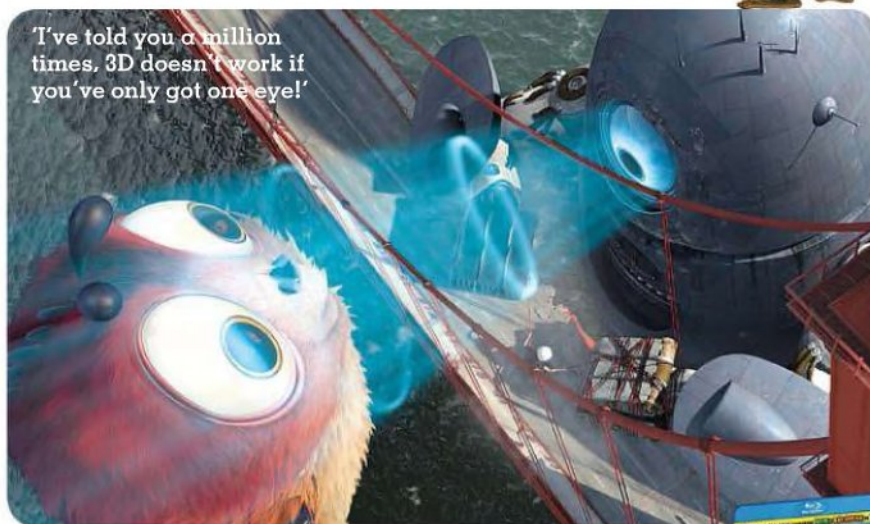
The hit 3D animation arrives on disc in 2D only

Monsters vs Aliens is the latest in a long line of DreamWorks CG-animated features that ultimately fails to live up to its intriguing concept. Young Susan Murphy's wedding day is ruined after a stray meteorite causes her to grow to enormous size. She's then imprisoned in a secret military base with other B-movie-inspired 'monsters' (Dr Cockroach, The Missing Link, Insectosaurus and the gelatinous B.O.B.), but gets to prove her worth when the monsters are put to work saving Earth from aliens.

Packed with action and nods to classic monster flicks, *MvA* is all good fun, but never really wows and – as often happens with DreamWorks' films – ultimately comes a cropper under the crushing weight of pop culture references.

Mark Craven: *MvA* arrives on Blu-ray with a solid AVC 2.35:1 encode. The visuals are sharp and full of colour, and detail levels are high, as you'd expect from a CG animation. The work put into the human characters' clothes, hair and skin, and B.O.B's gelatinous physique is right there, centre stage for all to see. Saying that, it's not an entirely satisfying experience. DreamWorks' animation style is oddly soulless, and *MvA* lacks both the tangible depth and cinematic feel of, say, Pixar's *Ratatouille*. A by-product of its bigscreen 3D origins, perhaps?

Steve May: The Dolby TrueHD mix of *MvA* is as sweet as molasses. Rich, effortless and imaginative, it places Foley and detail with care



and invention. After a diet of action movies it comes as a charming example of how great lossless surround can sound, without any recourse to ear-drum abuse – the voice work is rounded and immaculate, Henry Jackman's score is a keeper, and the horseshoe-shaped soundstage is never less than engrossing.

Anton van Beek: *Monsters vs Aliens* was given a 3D cinema release, but this Blu-ray is strictly 2D (because of the quality of existing home 3D tech, according to DreamWorks).

This disc does, however, include a new short cartoon and set-top game that are available to view in either 3D or 2D (thanks to four pairs of packaged anaglyph specs).

Other extras include an audio chat track, PIP video commentary, and much more.



HCC VERDICT

Monsters vs Aliens → DreamWorks All-region BD (US import) → £17 Approx (www.movietyme.com)

We say: A good AV experience, but not a classic 'toon

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

How the Grinch Stole Christmas

Universal → All-region BD
£20 Approx



Director Ron Howard and actor Jim Carrey did their utmost to ruin Dr Seuss' fabulous Christmas

story in this charmless live-action adaptation; this BD release is oddly lifeless, too, with a rather flat and muted VC-1 1080p encode. The DTS-HD 5.1 soundtrack is a little better, but still lacks spark. Extras are all ported across from the old DVD and include a commentary, deleted scenes and five short featurettes. There's no sign of Universal's now-standard BD-Live link, but the set does include a bonus DVD copy of the film. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

The Polar Express 3D

Warner → All-region BD
£20 Approx



This unintentionally creepy Christmas cartoon, populated by dead-eyed CG versions of Tom

Hanks, makes its second bow on Blu-ray, this time in 3D. The Blu-ray disc offers both 3D and 'flat' VC-1 2.40:1 encodes with Dolby TrueHD 5.1 audio, plus all of the extras from the earlier release. The set also includes a DVD 3D version and comes with four pairs of specs. The 3D isn't bad as far as anaglyph goes, but don't be surprised if Warner wheels out another BD with a superior presentation when the 3D-BD specification is finally settled. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Silent Night, Deadly Night

Arrow Video → R2 DVD
£16 Approx



It was the night before Christmas and all through the house, not a creature was stirring, except for a

psycho in a Santa suit killing anyone who gets on his 'naughty list'. Never before given a certificate in the UK, this unintentionally hilarious '80s slasher finally hits DVD with a fine Dolby 2.0 mix but a variable anamorphic 1.78:1 transfer – 80 per cent of the film looks great, the other 20 like an old VHS copy. Such is the price we must pay for an uncut version. Extras include an excellent booklet, featuring a retrospective of '80s genre icon Linnea Quigley. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Orphan

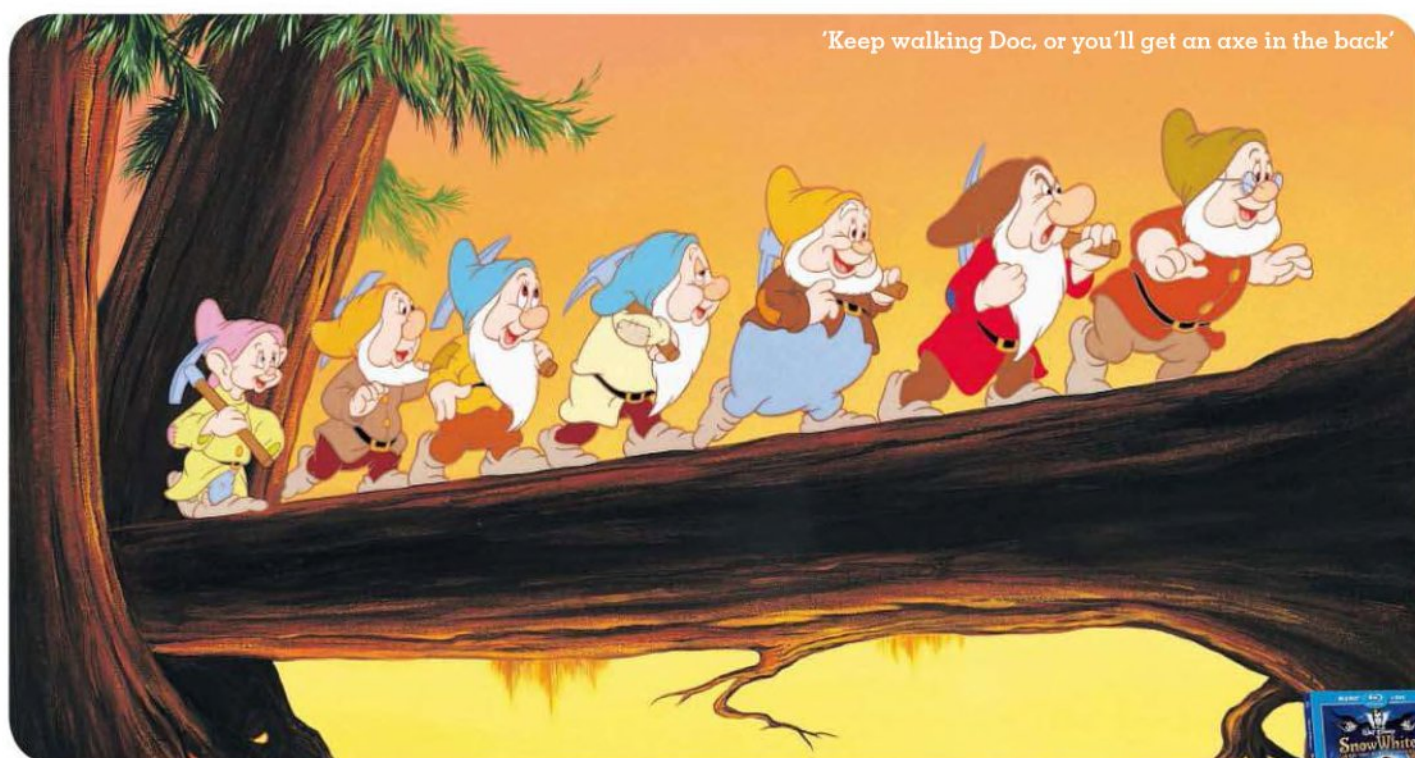
Optimum → Region B BD
£25 Approx



Hollywood dips its toe into the 'evil child' sub-genre once more with this entertaining chiller about an

adopted child with a deadly secret. Orphan isn't as trashy as you might expect, tackling some complex psychological issues and benefiting from extremely strong performances (especially from its young star). It also makes for a solid hi-def experience, thanks to a crisp AVC 1.85:1 encode and atmospheric DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack – although the disc defaults to an LPCM 2.0 mix when it loads. HD Extras include a featurette, interviews and deleted scenes. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5



'Hi-def, hi-def, it's off to...'

Another top-quality restoration by the Walt Disney 'Toon Team'

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs

is an iconic piece of cinema history. Walt Disney's take on the Brothers Grimm fairytale has become the definitive version, with story additions (such as the names of the dwarfs and Snow White being revived by the Prince's kiss) establishing a template all future adaptations (both on film and in print) would follow. Yet as well as being culturally significant, it's also an enchanting movie that can stand on its own two feet some 72 years after its initial release.

Mark Craven: First *Sleeping Beauty*, then *Pinocchio*, now this – Disney certainly knows a thing or two about hi-def restoration. Colour reproduction and detailing throughout *Snow White...*'s 1.37:1 AVC 1080p encode are both first-rate, with every brush stroke clearly visible on screen – it's like having the original animation cels hanging right there in your front room.

Steve May: As if by magic this once low-fi monaural animated classic arrives on BD with a DTS-HD MA 7.1 mix! Spreading the archived channel out to every corner of the soundstage is audacious to say the least, but it's a credit to the restoration team that their artifice isn't intrusive. Even the surreptitious use of LFE isn't too gross. For most of the film, though, the action is predominantly monophonic. Even when Snow White flees the huntsman through the haunted

forest, a frenetic sequence, the audio remains front facing, which feels true to the spirit of its classic origins. Pleasingly, dialogue isn't overly spitchy despite the recording limitations of the time.

Anton van Beek: For this debut Diamond Edition Blu-ray release, Disney has delivered an exceptional collection of supplementary features. Joining the film on Disc One are a commentary track (featuring archival interview excerpts with Walt Disney); DisneyView mode (filling the black bars at the side of the 1.37:1 image with painted art); a *Princess and the Frog* preview; a music video; two deleted scenes; three set-top games; and a look at a proposed sequel that was never made.

Disc Two features some choice cuts from the old DVD Special Edition (including a decade-by-decade look at the studio's history, another set-top game, sing-along songs and a featurette about voice actress Adriana Caselotti), plus a new 17-minute featurette about the film's cinematic significance. However, the real crown jewel is *Hyperion Studios*, an interactive studio tour that details every aspect of *Snow White*'s production through interviews, featurettes, galleries and archival audio content, as well as some early Disney shorts (including Mickey Mouse's first sound outing, *Steamboat Willie*).

As is the norm, the set also includes a DVD version of the movie, which features the audio commentary as its sole extra.



HCC VERDICT

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs: Diamond Edition → Walt Disney Home Entertainment Region B BD → £24 Approx

We say: Not the best Disney film, but this hi-def set does it full justice

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



SunriseEureka → All-Region BD
£25 Approx

I recently wrote that this Blu-ray release of FW Murnau's 1927 silent classic could be 'the most important release yet in the format's history' – a statement I still stand by today. The freshest release from Eureka's Masters of Cinema series, the disc contains stunningly restored versions of the 94-min Movietone and 79-min Czech prints. Almost as impressive are the Dolby TrueHD 2.0 soundtracks for each version, with the Movietone cut also featuring an alternate arrangement by Timothy Brock. Other extras include a commentary, outtakes, trailer, and 20-page booklet. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Eagles Over LondonSeverin Films → All-region BD
£25 Approx

Enzo Castellari's take on the Battle of Britain is a much more traditional WWII flick than his better-known *Inglorious Bastards*, and a cracking mix of suspense, espionage and aerial action.

This AVC 2.35:1 encode may well be the best the film will ever look, but it still leaves a bit to be desired – sharpness is lacking, and colours are occasionally muted. The Dolby 2.0 Surround mix would probably have been better left in its original mono form. Extras include the trailer plus chats with Castellari and Quentin Tarantino. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

North by Northwest: 50th Anniversary Ed.Warner → All-Region BD
£18 Approx

Alfred Hitchcock's expert thriller makes for a breathtaking HD experience, courtesy of this new

Blu-ray release. Working from the film's original VistaVision elements for an 8K digital scan, Warner's resulting VC-1 1.85:1 1080p encode is a thing of beauty – retaining the original grain structure, while allowing the colours and detailing to really pop. The lack of the original mono audio will be a bone of contention for some, but the Dolby TrueHD 5.1 mix is pleasing. Lots of extras to savour, too. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

The Towering InfernoWarner → All-Region BD
£18 Approx

Following the smash hit *The Poseidon Adventure*, Irwin Allen struck disaster movie gold for a second

time in the mid-'70s with this star-studded epic about a raging fire in a state-of-the-art skyscraper. Warner's new BD release makes amends for past barebones UK DVD releases – there's a plethora of extras here (including a commentary and storyboard-to-film comparisons), and the remastered VC-1 2.35:1 encode is a scorcher. The audio is also well served by both a new DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix and a DD version of the original four-channel mix. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Bigelow blows us away

Explosive Iraq war thriller that's da bomb

The Hurt Locker is a real return to form for director Kathryn Bigelow – an intelligent action thriller that engages the brain as well as shredding your nerves. Jeremy Renner takes centre stage, giving a first-rate performance as Staff Sgt. James, the newest member of a three-man US Army bomb disposal squad stationed in Iraq. Unlike his colleagues, James is addicted to the jeopardy of his job, taking unnecessary risks whenever possible, but even he isn't fully prepared for what this latest tour of duty will expose him to...

Chris Jenkins: For her Iraq war drama, Bigelow has opted for a handheld, *vérité* style of filmmaking that works well to create a feeling of realism, but doesn't necessarily scream hi-def when it comes to this Blu-ray release. The AVC 1.85:1 picture holds plenty of grain, (which gets a little thick during a couple of dark scenes), and does a solid job of replicating the subdued, yet natural, colour palette. An accurate encode then, but not anything spectacular.

Steve May: *The Hurt Locker's* 5.1 DTS-HD Master Audio soundmix is brutal. With explosions capable of doing collateral damage to most viewing rooms (thanks to a frightening LFE that's tight and realistic) and atmospherics so taut you could twang a tune on them, this is a genuine nerve-wrangler of a mix. I particularly like the use of the rears, with often-omnipresent planes and choppers placing you in downtown Baghdad. Composer Marco Beltrami is no stranger to hi-octane action movies (*Max Payne*, *Die Hard 4*) but here he plays with surprising restraint, emphasising the realism. Pay attention also to the gunfire – which has startling dynamics and a tendency to ricochet around the soundfield, as

if you're watching from within a diving bell.

Anton van Beek: *The Hurt Locker* Blu-ray has a rather disappointing collection of extra features, all of which have clearly been culled from the Electronic Press Kit. There's a generic 13-min Behind-the-Scenes featurette; poorly edited interviews with actors Anthony Mackie, Brian Geraghty, David Morse, Guy Pearce and Jeremy Renner (all of which clock in at around one/two minutes each, with the exception of Pearce who gets a whopping four minutes); some raw B-roll footage; and a photo gallery. At least it's all presented in HD.



Even worse, the commentary by Bigelow and writer Mark Boal promised for the US BD is MIA.



Bill Oddie's new bird-watching show appealed to the Yoof generation

HCC VERDICT

The Hurt Locker → Lionsgate/Optimum → Region B BD
£25 Approx

We say: The best war film in years looks good and sounds incredible on Blu. Shame about the extras...

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2009
BEST STYLE SPEAKER PACKAGE
B&W MT-30

The MT-25 is the latest member of the award-winning Mini Theatre range from Bowers & Wilkins. Compact and discreet the MT-25 will fill a room with rich, detailed multi-channel surround sound, thanks to a perfect partnership between the M-1 satellite speakers and the powerful ASW608 subwoofer.

Beneath its stylishly curved outer shell, the diminutive M-1 satellite speaker is bristling with state-of-the-art Bowers & Wilkins technology, including the famous Nautilus tube-loaded tweeters. Taking up front, side and rear channel positions in a 5.1 home theatre system, the M-1 is available in a choice of colours: black, silver or white.

Providing the bass channel in the surround sound set up, the ASW608 offers extraordinary power and control for such a compact subwoofer. Even better, it integrates beautifully with the M-1 satellites, creating a coherent, seamless soundscape. Ultra-solid construction and a 200 Watt Class D amplifier deliver maximum precision and power.

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Toy stories

No-brain ninja nonsense

G.I. Joe: The Rise of Cobra

is the second of this year's Summer blockbusters to be based on a popular toy line, and proves to be every bit as dumb as *Transformers 2*. The 'plot', for lack of a better word, can be boiled down to an international Special Forces team (including Marlon Wayans and a mute ninja) fighting an evil terrorist force with the aid of high-tech gadgetry. Throw in more flashbacks than an entire season of *Lost* and an action sequence that plays out like the opening of *Team America* – only played straight – and you have real cinematic clunker.

Mark Craven: *GI Joe's* AVC 2.40:1 encode is sharp and colourful, and relishes the brightly-lit action scenes like the CG-heavy chase through the streets of Paris in Chapters 11-12. Problems arise during darker sequences, where fine detailing drops off slightly and textures become a little mushy. It's far from disastrous, but holds the movie back from attaining a perfect score.

Steve May: Sibling franchise *Transformers* may have crashed and burned with a creatively bereft farrago, but there's still some hope in the kidult popcorn toy chest, at least if this hyperactive yarn is anything to go by. The audio antics are polished and high-budget with plenty of audacious system-testing thrills. Alan Silvestri's score is suitably symphonic and aural FX are panned enthusiastically front-to-back when required. I tend to think the general (loud) audio level



The Guardian Angels gained more respect when they got rid of those silly red berets



compromises real dynamics, but you'll certainly feel that you have got your money's worth. Dial up the kitchen-sink mayhem of Chapter 7 to work that amp, and thrill to the delicious zing of unfettered Ninja swordplay. How sharp do your speakers sound?

Anton van Beek: Not content with being a lousy film, this two-disc edition also serves up a batch of snoozeworthy special features.

The only bonus feature on the Blu-ray disc is an audio commentary with director Stephen 'Van Helsing' Sommers and producer Bob Duscay that, unsurprisingly, treats the film as if it's some kind of modern action classic. Seriously guys, it ain't. The other extras are a bog-standard 30-minute *Making of...* and a 21-minute look at the visual FX, which (to add insult to injury) are presented alongside a Digital Copy of the movie on plain old DVD. Boo!



HCC VERDICT

G.I. Joe: The Rise of Cobra – 2 Disc Digital Copy Edition
Paramount → All-region BD/R1
DVD (US Import) → £22 Approx
(www.movietyme.com)

We say: While it looks and sounds good, the dismal film and extras make this Blu-ray more 'No Joe!' than 'Yo Joe!'

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Moon

Sony Pictures → All-region BD
£25 Approx



Just as astronaut Sam Bell (Sam Rockwell) nears the end of a three-year post as the sole

person overseeing a Moon base, he discovers the body of another human at the site of an accident – a very familiar-looking human at that. Cue an engaging existential drama that works wonders on a low budget and makes for an impressive Blu-ray. Sony's AVC 2.40:1 image is sharp and detailed, the DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio is surprisingly spacious and there's a great collection of extras including commentaries, Q&As and featurettes. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

1941: 2-Disc Ed.

Universal Pictures → R2 DVD
£15 Approx



'An opportunity to break a lot of furniture,' is how director Steven Spielberg aptly

describes *1941* on this two-disc set's accompanying *Making of...* In fact, this doc, previously found on the LaserDisc edition, is the best thing about Universal's DVD set, with Spielberg and co covering in detail the production of his 1970s big-budget screwball comedy.

For a film of its vintage, the DD 5.1 mix is surprisingly energetic, and the 2.35:1 image is reasonable. Overall, it seems soft, and there's occasional print damage, but the colours are punchy and the black levels impress. **MC**

1 2 3 4 5

The Descent

Pathé → Region B BD
£23 Approx



Timed to coincide with the cinema release of its sequel, Neil Marshall's terrifying horror

finally comes to UK Blu-ray and really benefits from the move to hi-def. The AVC 2.35:1 encode initially looks a little too grainy, but once the action goes underground the 1080p visuals hit the spot, delivering rich colours, deep blacks and masses of fine detail. The audio is similarly robust, arriving in DTS-HD MA 5.1 and PCM 5.1 incarnations. Many of the extras are familiar from the R2 DVD but new are an interview with Marshall and a separate MPEG-2 encode with a PiP commentary track. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

The Texas Chain Saw Massacre: Seriously Ultimate Ed

Second Sight → All-Region BD
£20 Approx



Tobe Hooper's 1974 low-budget shocker seems like an odd fit with Blu-ray, but this HD platter manages

to deliver the best-looking version we've seen. There's only so much a 1080p encode can do with a film shot on grainy 16mm, no matter how much the source material has been restored, but colours and black levels are hugely improved. None of the Dolby Mono, PCM 2.0 or DTS 5.1 mixes are that adventurous, so it's best sticking with the original mono. Extras include chat tracks and a feature-length doc. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

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Feedback

Got an axe to grind? Want to comment on current technology? Need to share? **HCC** is here to help

Lip service

I've had Sky+HD for around six weeks now and generally find it a great experience.

The problem I have, though, is that the sound often follows several milliseconds after the picture, greatly destroying the impact and, thus ultimately, enjoyment. Is this common and is there any way of fixing it? Lip-sync in the set-up menu would not work as this only increases the sound delay.

I connect the Sky box to my Panasonic TH-50PZ81 via a Chord HDMI cable, and TCI Coral optical cable to my Parasound C2/A51 pre-pro/ power amp and KEF Reference 207 speakers. I do not get any similar lip-sync issues with my Panasonic DMR-E500.

Paresh, via email

device when it comes to audio-video sync. Sending video via one route (HDMI) and audio via another (optical) to different devices is a recipe for trouble.

Your problem seems to be that the audio is behind the video. More often, TV/display devices tend to have lots of video processing to deal with so that the video lags behind the audio. Using lip-sync delay on the audio brings it all back in sync. Unfortunately, the C2 is not the fastest data-crunching processor in the world and its Toslink input is a basic device that takes its time converting light-pulse data to a format the C2's audio DACs can read.

We can't find any company that produces an affordable video-delay device (most are pro-level mixing solutions) so it's looking like time to dump the C2 in favour of an HDMI-



Is the Parasound C2 processor causing lip-sync problems?

touting processor. Something like the Audiolab 8000AP would be a cost-effective option, but if your budget will stretch, the Rotel RSP-1570 is better still and would work very well with the punchy A51 power amp. The top-end choice would be something like Arcam's new AV777 (see p52), which would offer balanced connection to the A51, too.

Epson ensemble

I am looking at setting up a home cinema and was

wondering if you have ever come across the Epson Ensemble HD Complete Home Cinema. I note that it appears to be available in the US but I am unable to locate a UK outlet for this product.

I've searched your website and didn't find any reviews on this, but I'm interested if this is a product known to you, if it's available in the UK and, of course, whether it is any good?

Chris, via email

Epson's Ensemble HD is a neat proposition, bundling a screen, ➤

A Sky+ HD box is not the best



Can I mix and match my speakers?

Is it advisable to use two different brands of speakers in a home cinema system?

My speakers so far consist of Dali Mentor 6 fronts and a Mentor Vokal centre. My initial idea was to put two pairs of Lektor 2s as rears as, let's face it, buying Mentor rears would be overkill (notwithstanding that our brains can't process sound as efficiently once we're watching a movie). Recent Monitor Audio speakers have interested me – the Silver RX range, notably the FX speakers and the subwoofer. Would I be totally mad to have two pairs of FX speakers as my rears, and two of the Silver RX subwoofers?

I know other people mix their brands quite frequently, but I don't want to make a mistake. I want (and have) awesome stereo, and now I would like to have a damn good home cinema system too. What's your opinion?

Lastly, I believe the sensitivity of speakers is very important. I have seen many a system with sensitivities all over the shop. With the Monitor Audio FX rears, the sensitivity is 89dB, and the Mentor 6s is 89.5dB. Surely that should be fine?

Michael O'Grady, via email

A lot of people do mix-and-match speakers in a multi-channel set-up, but by far the best approach is that hailed by THX – identical loudspeakers for every channel. This gives the smoothest pan and most natural surround sound experience, although, granted, it might not be the most cost-effective solution.

The second best option is to stick with speakers in the same manufacturer's range or at the very least from the same manufacturer – the Lektors would be pretty darn perfect, especially as you are already happy with the Mentors up front.

Sensitivity is important but not as important as getting cohesive voicing from all of your main speakers – and for that you really do need to stick to one manufacturer.

Winner: Star Letter-writer Michael O'Grady wins a copy of *The Hurt Locker* Blu-ray courtesy of Lions Gate Home Entertainment. It's available to buy now, priced at £25.



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projector, subwoofer, speaker module and AV controller into one purchase. Unfortunately, though, Epson says there are no plans for releasing it outside of the US. It would also be unwise to import the system due to power differences between the countries. Your better bet is to pair one of Epson's standalone PJs with separates components.

We blame Dan Brown

How and why did engineers hit on 1080 lines for HD? I have been reading a book on sacred and related numbers and, assuming the figures by the author are correct, both 108 and 1080 recur repeatedly:

The distance of the Earth from the Moon is 108 times the latter's diameter. The distance of the Sun to the Earth is 108 times Earth's diameter. The radius of the Moon is 1,080 miles. And the diameter of the Sun is 108 times the diameter of the Earth.

In Islam, 108 is the number associated with God. 1,080 is the number of the Holy Spirit as feminine. There are 108 beads on a Hindu Japa mala. Hindu deities have 108 names. In *The Odyssey*, Penelope has 108 suitors. The Angelus bell is rung 108 times. $1+0+8+0=9$, the last whole number which always relates itself to infinity. 1,080 is considered a centrally important sacred number.

Evidently, the choice of 1080 must be somehow archetypal – does anyone at HCC have any explanation? Such a figure seems arbitrary, but is clearly not. Roger Payne, via email

There are mathematical reasons for the horizontal

resolution of a 16:9 Full HD display to be 1080 – many of which are so mind-bogglingly complex that if there is a supernatural force at work, it must be good at algebra.

However, there may be something in what you say: The native resolution of a Full HD TV is 1,920 x 1,080, and in the year 1920, China, which is the country of origin for a large amount of tellies, suffered a massive, catastrophic earthquake. The number of people who died was... 180,000. Which is a bit like 1080. Spooky. Ish.

Tosh troubles

I hope you can help me. My parents purchased a Toshiba 32WLT66 LCD TV around two years ago. But, about eight months ago we noticed a thin vertical shadow appearing on the screen approximately one third in from the right-hand side. The shadow, which is translucent, isn't too noticeable on a bright background but is very pronounced on dark backgrounds. Recently, it has worsened and it now appears that the picture colouration on each side of the shadow is not the same.

I own a Toshiba 42WLT68 LCD TV, and I have just noticed a similar shadow starting to appear on my screen. It isn't too bad at the moment, but, considering my parents' experience, it may become a bigger problem.

The shadow appears on screen whichever source is used – Sky, Freeview or games console – so the problem doesn't appear to be anything to do with satellite or terrestrial reception but seems to be

uniquely associated with the screen itself.

Have you had any prior experience of this problem and are you able to suggest any possible remedy?

Phil Rigg, via email

It sounds like both LCD TVs are exhibiting issues with their CCFL backlights. As the backlights consist of numerous strip lights, the symptoms you describe are likely to be due to one or more of those strips failing, or becoming out of phase with their neighbours. They would shine less and their duller appearance would create a line of what seems like a shadow on screen. Also, as LCD technology relies on its backlight for brightness, it would also affect colour saturation around the area. Sadly, this is a technical issue that can only be resolved by the customer services of the manufacturer, in this case Toshiba. In your parents' case, that may be costly considering the age of the set, but your own might still be covered by the initial warranty.

Revenge of the buyer

I have just had the misfortune to watch *Transformers 2* on Blu-ray, and I can't believe the sound quality of this title. How you gave this three stars (in HCC #176) I'll never know. Dialogue is so quiet and gets lower as the actors finish their lines. If I turned up my amp I then had the neighbours banging on the walls because it was too loud (sound FX also drowned out dialogue). Didn't Paramount check this title before release? Paul Kelly, Plymouth

We criticised the tiring nature of the *Transformers 2* soundtrack, and, yes, the dialogue is quiet in comparison to some of the explosive elements of the mix – but really, is the dialogue in this awful movie important? ●

Write to Letters, Home Cinema Choice, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW, or email us at hcc@futurenet.co.uk. Due to the volume of letters we receive we cannot guarantee to print/answer them all.

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How we test

Home Cinema Choice's hardware reviews combine the subjective opinion of our seasoned reviewers with hard technical data.

Chris Jenkins explains how the *HCC* Tech Labs work

HCC reviews tend to be a mixture of subjective opinion and objective data. While we value the subjective opinions of our highly experienced reviews team, we like to blend and balance their opinions with objective measurements. The *HCC* Tech Labs have been measuring AV equipment for nearly 20 years. It was originally conceived to evaluate the performance of VCRs and CRT TVs, and it is now routinely testing Blu-ray players and HD displays.

Interestingly, much of our first generation hardware is still in use (we maintain an irrational fondness for an oscilloscope used to determine the onset of clipping on amplifiers), although our more venerable hardware is now supplemented by new software and measurement methodologies. One thing remains unchanged though: our commitment to supply you with the best possible buying advice.

Virtual Tour

Our Tech Labs consist of two main facilities: a Viewing Room, and a Test Lab.

The Viewing Room is used mainly for testing TVs, projectors and speakers and has been designed to reproduce the conditions that are found in a typical mid-range home cinema setup. It was created by award-winning custom installers Pounds (www.poundstv.co.uk), and is completely light-proofed. While it is not designed to be sound-proof, it has been skinned in Acoustiblock and has been acoustically treated and tuned by the experts at RPG (www.rpg-europe.co.uk), using custom absorbers and diffusers. The room features multiple HDMI, component video and audio cable runs, as well as analogue and digital TV and satellite feeds, and has a resident 7.2

speaker system. Multiple screens can be fed the same source material simultaneously, courtesy of a Gefen 2-in-4-out HDMI switcher/splitter, for screen shootouts.

Number crunching

The Test Lab is used mainly for number-crunching DVD/Blu-ray players and amplifiers. It's equipped with two industry-standard systems: a Tektronix VM700 video data analyser, and an Audio Precision APX585 multichannel audio analyser. Using standard test signals from discs and signal generators, these two systems are used to measure factors such as audio and video signal jitter, frequency response and output power. These give us a good general idea of the component quality, processing power and overall performance of players and amplifiers.

Professionals at large

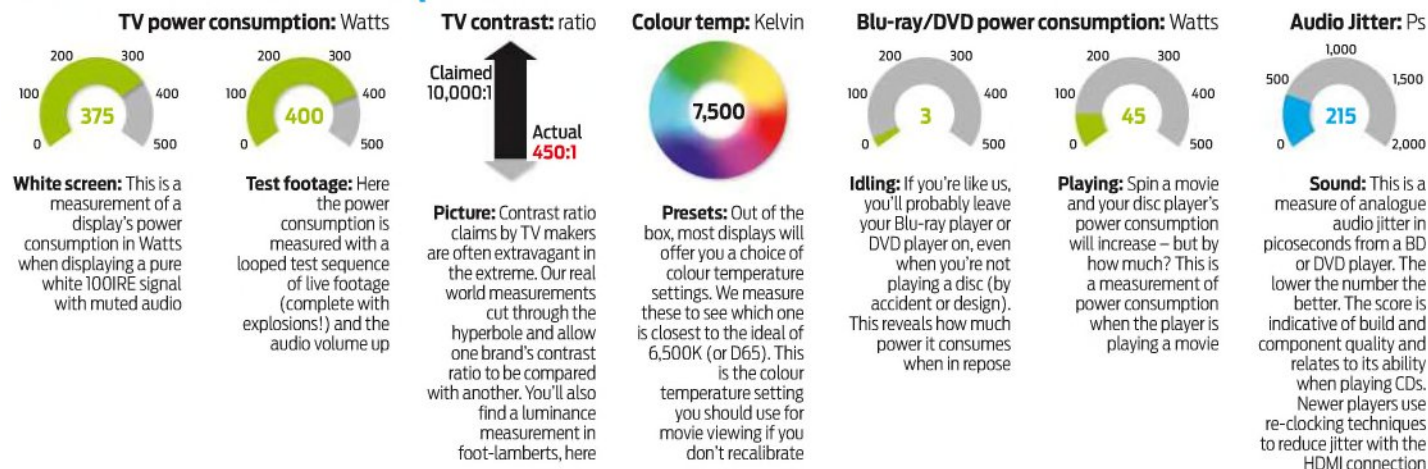
Over the years, our testers have been trained in calibration and testing techniques by the ISF, Tektronix, the Home Acoustics Alliance and other industry bodies. In short, when you read a review in *HCC*, you can be sure that the reviewer's subjective opinion is backed up by objective scientific lab testing.

Understandable and useful

One of our pledges is to present information that is both understandable and useful, for example, exposing the hype perpetrated by some makers of plasmas and LCD TVs regarding contrast ratios. To determine real world contrast, as well as measuring colour temperature presets, we employ a Sencore VP401 signal generator alongside a PC running Datacolor Colorfacts software with a Spyder 2 sensor. We use the Sencore signal generator and our own discs to generate standard TV



Tech Lab tests explained



**Test bench:**

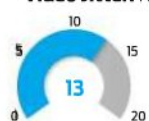
Equipment from the likes of Snell & Wilcox, and Tektronix allows us to compare all manner of kit

signals. Colorfacts analyses the colour and luminance performance of TVs and projectors, giving us information in areas such as contrast ratio, colour temperature and luminance.

Playback

Increasingly, you've been asking for more information on power consumption, and so we've now moved these

results to a headline position on our tests. We've also developed a more graphical presentation (key below) of some of the data we produce, which should make the facts more relevant and digestible. Not all the data we generate is published (frankly, you'd be bored) but all of it goes into the melting pot of opinion. While one key reviewer is bylined for our tests, as many as four team players will contribute to our findings ●

Video Jitter: Ns

Vision: This is a measure of video jitter in nanoseconds from a BD or DVD player. The lower the number the better. The score is indicative of build and component quality. We also present figures for Chroma Crosstalk (another quality indicator) and frequency response @5.8MHz

Loading: Boot/Java

Boot speed & tray eject

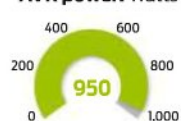
15s

Tray in to main BD menu

45s

Disc loading & Java:

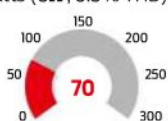
Blu-ray players can be notoriously slow to load and play discs, thanks to the DRM and Java content of BD software. These timings are crucial to the user experience – naturally faster is best

AVR power: Watts

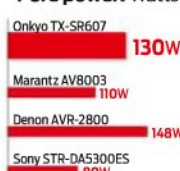
Powered: When you fire up that big AV receiver to watch a new movie you may be surprised to learn just how much current it's drawing. This is one of two measurements we take for AV amp power consumption. The other is when the AVR is powered up but idle

Amp output power: Watts (8Ω, 0.5% THD)

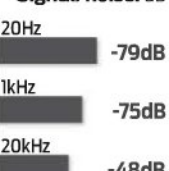
2-channel 8Ω: So just how heroic is that AVR you've been saving for? Putting aside paper claims, we measure its output in two-channel stereo mode. Also noted here is a figure for Total Harmonic Distortion



5-channel 8Ω: In most cases, an amplifier's muscle will be diminished when it runs in multichannel mode. We push the product to extremes in a 5.1 configuration to see how much grunt is available with all channels driven

Pure power: Watts

Fidelity firewall: This is our measurement of power untainted by distortion (typically 0.052THD, 8Ω, 1kHz). It's an indicator of both power output and component quality

Signal/noise: dB

S/N tests: These amp measurements reveal the ratio of noise to signal at a specific frequency. Readings taken at low, mid and high points help determine imaging clarity and sonic character

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*Some products are not available in all stores or via mail order. Please call before travelling or visit www.ssav.com to check. Advert valid until 06/01/2010. E&OE

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TOP
BUYER'S GUIDE
**All killer
no
filler**



HCC Ratings key

Officially awesome	1 2 3 4 5
Essential purchase	1 2 3 4 5
Does the job	1 2 3 4 5
Disappointing	1 2 3 4 5
Don't touch it	1 2 3 4 5

FEBRUARY 2010 HOME CINEMA CHOICE

www.journal-plaza.net & www.freedowns.net

LCD TV

Best on test...



SONY
46in → KDL-46Z5500
£1,900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

2009 Z-Series builds upon previous Bravia know-how

Highs: Wonderfully detailed pictures; bright, crisp colours
Lows: Black levels are a tad light; poor off-axis viewing

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 173
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



SAMSUNG
32in → LE32B650
£650 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Net-savvy 32incher is a real bargain buy

Highs: Huge feature count; excellent HD pics; sexy design
Lows: SD performance and audio is average

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 172
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



SAMSUNG
46in → UE-46B8000
£1,800 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Top-flight edge-lit LED panel will sell like hot cakes

Highs: Outstanding picture quality; 200Hz works well
Lows: Some of the settings are awful; limited viewing angle

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 174
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



LG
42in → 42SL8000
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

LG's debut 'Seamless' LCD is excellent value for money

Highs: Colour fidelity and contrast; connectivity; design
Lows: Take care when using the 200Hz mode

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes

Tested: Issue 175
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



SHARP
52in → LC52LE700E
£1,900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Bigscreen LED LCD with calibration skills

Highs: Low power use; bright, involving pictures
Lows: Muted reds; poor off-axis viewing; average audio

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (to 1080p24)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (& CI slot)

Tested: Issue 176
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews

Also Recommended...



LG
32in → 32LH4000
£460 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Budget offering from LG delivers where it counts

Highs: Exceptional value; good design; connectivity and images
Lows: Black levels; restricted viewing angle; audio is average

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 172
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



SONY
37in → KDL-40W5500
£900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Excellent LCD all-rounder

Highs: Impressive dynamic contrast and smooth motion; networking features
Lows: Styling is bland; AppliCast needs more content

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 171
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



TOSHIBA
42in → 42ZV555D
£900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Much-touted Resolution+ LCD gives a polish to SD sources

Highs: HD performance; Resolution+ doesn't disappoint
Lows: Uninspired sound and design; no Res+ over HDMI

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (to 1080p24)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (& analogue & CI slot)

Tested: Issue 165
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews

Editor's Choice...

PHILIPS
56in → Cinema 21:9
£4,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5



Philips' groundbreaking ultra widescreen TV needs to be seen to be believed. It's deceptively large (about as wide as a traditional 65in TV) and genuinely brings a sense of cinema to your 2.35:1 movies. Expanded 16:9 material is surprisingly watchable, too. There are other frills here – Ambilight, 200Hz processing, five HDMI inputs, Net TV and DLNA certification – but it's the forward-thinking design and technology of the 21:9 that will blow you away. Whether the concept takes hold remains to be seen, though.

Tested: Issue 171
For price check visit: www.techradar.com/reviews

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
2560 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 5
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Plasma TV

Best on test...



PIONEER
60in → KRP-600A
£5,000 Approx



Kuro with separate media box, Ethernet and satellite tuner

Highs: Awesome black levels; colour accuracy; slim panel; media-savvy
Lows: Problems with AVI files

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 3 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (plus CI slot and DVB-S2 tuner)

Tested: Issue 164

For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



PANASONIC
65in → TX-P65V10B
£4,500 Approx



Currently the biggest, bestest plasma you can buy

Highs: High-impact bigscreen pictures; Freesat HD
Lows: Lack of manual colour temp controls; sucks electricity

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (plus Freesat tuner and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 174

For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



PANASONIC
50in → TX-P50V10B
£1,900 Approx



THX-certified, Viera Cast-touting NeoPDP

Highs: THX mode is stunning out of the box; good feature set
Lows: Unspectacular black level response; a bit chunky

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (plus Freesat tuner and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 171

For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



PIONEER
50in → PDP-LX5090
£2,500 Approx



Baby brother of the LX6090 Kuro panel

Highs: Unbelievable contrast and black levels; superb detail
Lows: Speakers are an optional extra only

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 3 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (plus CI slot)

Tested: Issue 159

For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



LG
32in → 32PG6000
£500 Approx



World's smallest 32in plasma challenges LCD rivals

Highs: Smooth movement; good blacks and connectivity
Lows: Lack of detail; some jagged edges; average audio

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes
1024 x 720 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (plus analogue)

Tested: Issue 162

For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews

Also Recommended...



LG
50in → 50PG6000
£1,100 Approx



Superb HD Ready plasma offering great value for money

Highs: Extensive calibration possibilities; excellent black level; sexy bezel
Lows: Not Full HD

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes
1366 x 768 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (plus CI slot)

Tested: Issue 154

For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



PANASONIC
37in → TH-37PX80
£650 Approx



Small PDP from Panasonic continues the Viera vibe

Highs: Beautiful blacks; natural colours; good GUI
Lows: HDMI v1.2 inputs lack DeepColor support

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes
1024 x 720 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3 (v1.2)
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes

Tested: Issue 162

For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



SAMSUNG
50in → PS50A556
£1,000 Approx



Bargain-priced monster screen with a few caveats

Highs: Superb specification; great build quality; sharp detail
Lows: Some motion artefacts and noise visible

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (plus CI slot)

Tested: Issue 161

For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews

Editor's Choice...

PANASONIC
46in → TX-P46Z1
£4,300 Approx



THX certification, full 1080p wireless transmission, ultra-thin design...

Panasonic's flagship plasma TV is a giant leap forward for the display technology. Add in the Freesat HD tuner, Viera Cast and DLNA networkability and stunning HD and SD pictures and you begin to understand the premium price tag. Some might argue that its black levels aren't as jaw-dropping as a Pioneer Kuro – but those screens aren't being made any more. The Z1 is simply the best plasma TV you can buy.

Tested: Issue 172

For price check visit: www.techradar.com/reviews



→ Specifications

HD Ready: yes (up to 1080p/24)
Native resolution: 1920 x 1080
No. of HDMI inputs: 4 (v1.3)
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (and Freesat)

Blu-ray Players

Best on test...



PIONEER
Blu-ray → BDP-LX91
£1,800 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Reference status BD deck is also a first-rate CD and DVD player

Highs: Stunning picture; great sound; packed with features and well-designed

Lows: Precision Quartz Lock System works with CDs only

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Yes, via Ethernet

Tested: Issue 167

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/reviews



SAMSUNG
Blu-ray → BD-P3600
£250 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Top-level Samsung BD spinner

Highs: Impressive pics and sound; 7.1-channel output; DivX HD playback

Lows: No WMA support; PC streaming tricky to set up; Wi-Fi requires dongle

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Ethernet, Wi-Fi via supplied dongle, USB

Tested: Issue 174

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/reviews



LG
Blu-ray → BD390
£290 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Improved players sports more features than BD370

Highs: Excellent performance; 1GB internal storage; Wi-Fi net connection, 7.1 analogue outputs

Lows: Audio can't match its premium BD rivals

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Yes, via Ethernet/Wi-Fi (including YouTube), USB

Tested: Issue 174

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/reviews



PANASONIC
Blu-ray → DMP-BD80
£350 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Flagship 2009 deck adds YouTube fun to top-class specs

Highs: Full multichannel outputs; superb, detailed images; net functionality

Lows: Uninspired design; sluggish loading times

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Ethernet, VieraCast, SD card slot, USB 2.0

Tested: Issue 169

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/reviews



SONY
Blu-ray → PS3 Slim
£250 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

The new Slim version of the PS3 adds some AV improvements

Highs: HD gaming, heaps of internal memory; bitstreaming of HD audio

Lows: Hungry for electricity; remote control costs extra

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (via proprietary dongle)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: 2 USB, Ethernet, Wi-Fi, Bluetooth

Tested: Issue 174

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/reviews

Editor's Choice...

SONY
Blu-ray → BDP-S760 → £380 Approx

1 2 3 4 5



Sony has a few Blu-ray decks now that are comfortably better than its PlayStation 3 console, and the keenly-priced S760 is our favourite. It incorporates the HD Reality Enhancer and Super Bit-Mapping picture-processing tech of its £1,200 BDP-S5000ES stablemate (albeit in a thinner chassis) and the results are startling – detailed, deep, colour-rich HD visuals and quality surround sound delivery. Some might miss the lack of esoteric codec support (no MKV here, folks) but that's not what this Sony is about – consider it a reference machine for the budget-conscious.

Tested: Issue 176

For price check visit: www.techradar.com/reviews

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No/No
Networkability: Ethernet; Wi-Fi; USB

Also Recommended



PIONEER
Blu-ray → BDP-LX52
£500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Stripped-down LX-branded player is a mid-range marvel

Highs: Class-leading picture and sound

Lows: Not simple to get to grips with; multichannel PQLS function only works on LPCM

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (stereo only)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No/No
Networkability: Yes via Ethernet; USB

Tested: Issue 176

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/reviews



PHILIPS
Blu-ray → BDP7300
£230 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Debut UK deck from Philips was worth the wait

Highs: Internal 1GB storage; multichannel analogue outputs; vivid, detailed image

Lows: Stylised 'curved' look not for everyone

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (5.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Yes via Ethernet; USB

Tested: Issue 175

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/reviews



SONY
Blu-ray → BDP-S360
£190 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Affordable Sony Blu-ray is a real rival to its PS3

Highs: Stylish design and good AV performance; very solid construction

Lows: External memory required for BD-Live access

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (stereo only)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Yes, via Ethernet

Tested: Issue 175

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/reviews

Recorders

Best on test...



SONY
DVDR → RDR-HXD995
£250 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Heavyweight Freeview+ unit with features galore

Highs: Excellent AV performance; flexible recording modes; multimedia prowess

Lows: Records 'interactive red dot'; possible aerial sensitivity

→ Specifications

HDD size: 250GB
Twin tuners: Yes, digital and analogue
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
Camcorder input: Yes
Format: -R/RW, +R/RW
Dual-layer recording: Yes

Tested: Issue 165
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



HUMAX
Freesat PVR → Foxsat HDR
£300 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

First Freesat HD PVR brings extra clout to fledgling system

Highs: Cinch to operate; good performance; ITV in HD; JPEG/MP3 playback

Lows: Annoying LCD; slow to boot up; needs more HD content!

→ Specifications

HDD size: 320GB
Twin tuners: Yes, Freesat HD (satellite – requires dish)
HDMI: Yes
Component output: No
CI slot: Yes
Freeview+: No

Tested: Issue 165
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



SAGEM
PVR → DTR67500T
£180 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

500GB Freeview+ PVR with USB archiving

Highs: Capacious HDD; flexible and intuitive EPG; picture quality is excellent

Lows: No way of importing recordings from other devices

→ Specifications

HDD size: 500GB
Twin tuners: Yes, Freeview
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
CI slot: No
Freeview+: Yes

Tested: Issue 173
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



LG
DVDR/3.1 → HRT403DA
£500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Convergence king offers 3.1 audio and HDD/DVD recording

Highs: Acceptable, punchy audio; well-specified recorder; quality DVD pictures

Lows: Lacks DTS support; no 5.1 upgrade path

→ Specifications

HDD size: 160GB
Twin tuners: Yes, digital and analogue
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
Camcorder input: Yes
Format: -R/RW, +R/RW, -RAM
Dual-layer recording: Yes

Tested: Issue 165
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



TOPFIELD
PVR → TF5810PVR
£350 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Freeview+ PVR with enormous 500GB HDD

Highs: Easy to use; PC connectivity; upscales Freeview; twin tuners offer great flexibility

Lows: Competing with high-end DVD recorders

→ Specifications

HDD size: 500GB
Twin tuners: Yes, Freeview
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
CI slot: Yes
Freeview+: Yes

Tested: Issue 156
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews

Also recommended



PIONEER
DVDR → DVR-560HX
£400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Full PC-linked multimedia jukebox and DVD/HDD unit

Highs: Excellent AV performance and features spread; networkability

Lows: Jukebox abilities reliant on Windows Media Player

→ Specifications

HDD size: 160GB
Twin tuners: Yes, digital & analogue
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
Camcorder input: Yes
Format: -R/RW, +R/RW, -RAM
Dual-layer recording: Yes

Tested: Issue 159
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



PANASONIC
DVDR → DMR-EX79
£300 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

2009 DVD/HDD recorder improves slightly on the EX78

Highs: AV performance is first-rate; heaps of features and recording flexibility

Lows: No STB control; can't copy DivX/JPEG to HDD

→ Specifications

HDD size: 250GB
Twin tuners: No, 1 x digital only
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
Camcorder input: Yes
Format: -R/RW, +R/RW, -RAM
Dual-layer recording: Yes

Tested: Issue 169
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



HUMAX
PVR → PVR-9300T
£200 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Souped-up Humax drops USB socket but boosts HDD capacity

Highs: Easy and responsive to use; fine AV performance; well-featured

Lows: Limited HDMI modes; no USB functionality

→ Specifications

HDD size: 320GB
Twin tuners: Yes
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
CI slot: Yes
Digital tuner: Freeview
Freeview+: Yes

Tested: Issue 162
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews

Editor's Choice...

PANASONIC
DVD/BDR → DMR-BR850 → £1,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5



With its 500GB HDD, twin Freesat HD tuners, profile 2.0 Blu-ray player/recorder and Viera Cast online interactivity, this Panasonic deck is clearly the king of convergence. As a BD-spinner it's solid, sharing the gizzards of the brand's DMP-BD60, and as a PVR it's simply brilliant, with the mix of hard disc and Blu-ray drive allowing for all sorts of archiving and editing possibilities. The USB, firewire and SD inputs – and in-built Gracenote database – add even more flexibility.

Tested: Issue 170
For price check visit: www.techradar.com/reviews

→ Specifications

Hard disk: 500GB
Twin Tuners: Yes 2 x Freesat HD
Component output: Yes (progressive)
Freeview+: No, it's Freesat
Format: BD-RE, BD-R, DVD-R/RW, +R/RW, -RAM
Dual-layer recording: Yes

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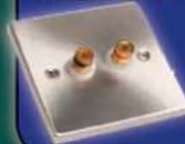
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Projectors

Best on test...



SIM2
DLP → Grand Cinema
C3X 1080
£23,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Reference-status PJ with brilliant colour management

Highs: Gorgeous design; small form factor; dazzling pictures

Lows: SD processing isn't quite hi-end enough for the price

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): NA
Contrast (claimed): 10,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 2,000 hours
Fan noise: NA
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 169

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/reviews



EPSON
LCD → EH-TW3800
£2,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

A flawless example of cutting-edge 1080p LCD PJ technology

Highs: Quiet in operation; looks classy; superb picture; easy setup

Lows: Higher-end rivals deliver deeper black levels

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,800 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 18,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: 22dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 167

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/reviews



JVC
D-ILA → HD350
£3,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Fantastically filmic PJ is a steal at £3,500

Highs: Stunning picture quality; runs quietly; easy and flexible to setup

Lows: No direct PC hookup; DLP rivals may be brighter

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: No, use HDMI instead
Brightness (claimed): 1,000 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 30,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 2,000 hours
Fan noise: 19dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 167

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/reviews



OPTOMA
DLP → Themescene HD82
£2,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

A tasty development of a distinguished product line

Highs: Good blacks levels; impressive colour performance; easy to set up

Lows: Some dynamic iris noise; some DLP rainbow effect

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2 x v1.3
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,300 ANSI Lumens
Contrast (claimed): 20,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 3,000 hours
Fan noise: 26dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 173

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/reviews



PANASONIC
LCD → PT-AE3000
£2,200 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Excellent all-rounder packed with user-friendly features

Highs: Good black level, contrast and colours; flexibility; quiet running

Lows: Needs tweaking for best results; no 12V trigger

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 3
Component inputs: 2
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,600 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 60,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 2,000 hours
Fan noise: 22dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 166

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/reviews

Also Recommended...



CINEVERSUM
LCoS → BlackWing One
£4,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Sexily-styled French LCoS model undercuts JVC and Sony

Highs: Sharp; colourful images; versatile setup and installation options

Lows: Average black level lets the BlackWing One down

Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,200 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 15,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 2,000 hours
Fan noise: 20dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 174

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/reviews



OPTOMA
DLP → HD20
£900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Wallet-friendly model is an ideal first projector

Highs: Excellent detail resolution; reasonable contrast and brightness

Lows: Some fan noise; rainbow effect; limited throw distance

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,700 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 500:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: 29dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 176

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/reviews



VIVITEK
DLP → H9080FD
£10,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

The world's first 'lampless' LED projector

Highs: Excellent colour fidelity; great definition; long lifespan

Lows: Lacks brightness; early adopters pay for the innovative LED tech

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: No, use HDMI instead for PC hookup
Brightness (claimed): 1,000 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 15,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: NA
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 173

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/reviews

Editor's Choice...

SONY
SXR → VPL-VW850
£5,400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5



The successor to the well-received VW80 again shows that Sony's SXR-branded LCoS wizardry can take on any challengers in the high-end projector market. The copious picture tweaks available mean achieving a truly cinematic picture is a doddle; the astonishing contrast ratio and detail levels help, too. Add in the 12V trigger, bundled gamma adjustment software and near silent running, and we reckon this could become an installers' fave.

Tested: Issue 174

For price check visit: www.techradar.com/reviews

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
PC compatibility: VGA
Brightness (claimed): 800 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 120,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 3,000 hours
Fan noise: 20dB
24fps: Yes

AV Receivers

Best on test...



PIONEER
AVR → SC-LX82
£1,900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

ICE-powered AIR Studios-tuned AVR replaces the SC-LX81

Highs: Punchy, highly detailed sound; brilliant features; looks fabulous; solid build

Lows: Pioneer doesn't do height/width processing

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 190W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes, and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: THX Ultra2 Plus
Component input: 3
HDMI: 5-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 175

For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



SONY
AVR → STR-DA5400ES
£1,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Class-leading mid-priced AVR with power and poise

Highs: Excellent build; audiophile SACD and CD playback; full of power

Lows: No Ethernet port, THX certification or DAB radio

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 120W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes
Serial port control: No
THX certification: No
Component input: 2
HDMI: 5-in, 1-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 166

For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



ONKYO
AVR → TX-NR807
£800 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Powerful and potent height/width processor at a great price

Highs: Full-on gung-ho sound with massive bass; DSX/DPLIIz processing; excellent upscaling

Lows: Slightly flimsy build; no USB or multichannel inputs

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 180W (6Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM/Net)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: Select2 Plus
Component input: 2
HDMI: 6-in, 1-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: No

Tested: Issue 164

For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



DENON
AVR → AVR-4310
£1,900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Audyssey DSX-toting AVR will change the way you think about speaker placement

Highs: Awesome sound as standard; extra width and height channels are a boon

Lows: Lacks the 9.1 DSX option

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 130W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes, and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 6-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 173

For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



DENON
AVR → AVR-2309
£600 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Mid-range HD audio unit lacks networking but sounds superb

Highs: Fabulous balance with HD audio; punchy sound with CDs; powerful

Lows: No networking and only 1 HDMI output

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 100W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 4-in, 1-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 162

For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews

Editor's Choice...

ARCAM
AVR → AVR600
£3,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

British manufacturer Arcam arrived late to the HD audio party, but the AVR600 is certainly worth the wait. Utilising a Class G analogue amplifier, this silver machine is cool-running and efficient, while an entire 'root and branch' overhaul of multichannel AV amp design has allowed Arcam to tackle audio jitter head on. Yet this isn't purely an audiophile product – it's packed with custom install features, offers an insane array of connections, and delivers Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD MA Blu-ray mixes with aplomb. A class act from a classic brand.

Tested: Issue 174

For price check visit: www.techradar.com/reviews

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 120W (8Ω)
Upscaling to HDMI: Yes
Tuner: DAB/AM/FM
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD: Yes/Yes
Zone 2: Yes and Zone 3
Serial port control: Yes, 2
THX certification: No
Component input: 5
HDMI: 5-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)



Also Recommended...



NAD
AVR → T747
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Excellent AVR offers more grunt than its specs suggest

Highs: Storming all-round performance; eases you into every film; simple to use

Lows: No Ethernet or USB inputs; DAB costs extra

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 60W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 4-in, 1-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 174

For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



ONKYO
AVR → TX-SR607
£500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Mid-range HD receiver with Dolby 'Height' processing

Highs: Excellent onscreen display; twin subwoofer outputs

Lows: Dolby Pro-Logic IIz not as versatile as Audyssey DSX

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 145W (6Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes (stereo audio only)
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 2
HDMI: 6-in, 1-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: No

Tested: Issue 176

For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



YAMAHA
Amp → DSP-Z7
£2,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Trimmed-down version of the award-winning Z11

Highs: Large sound with huge bass and plenty of detail

Lows: Orange display; disconcerting pops when changing sources

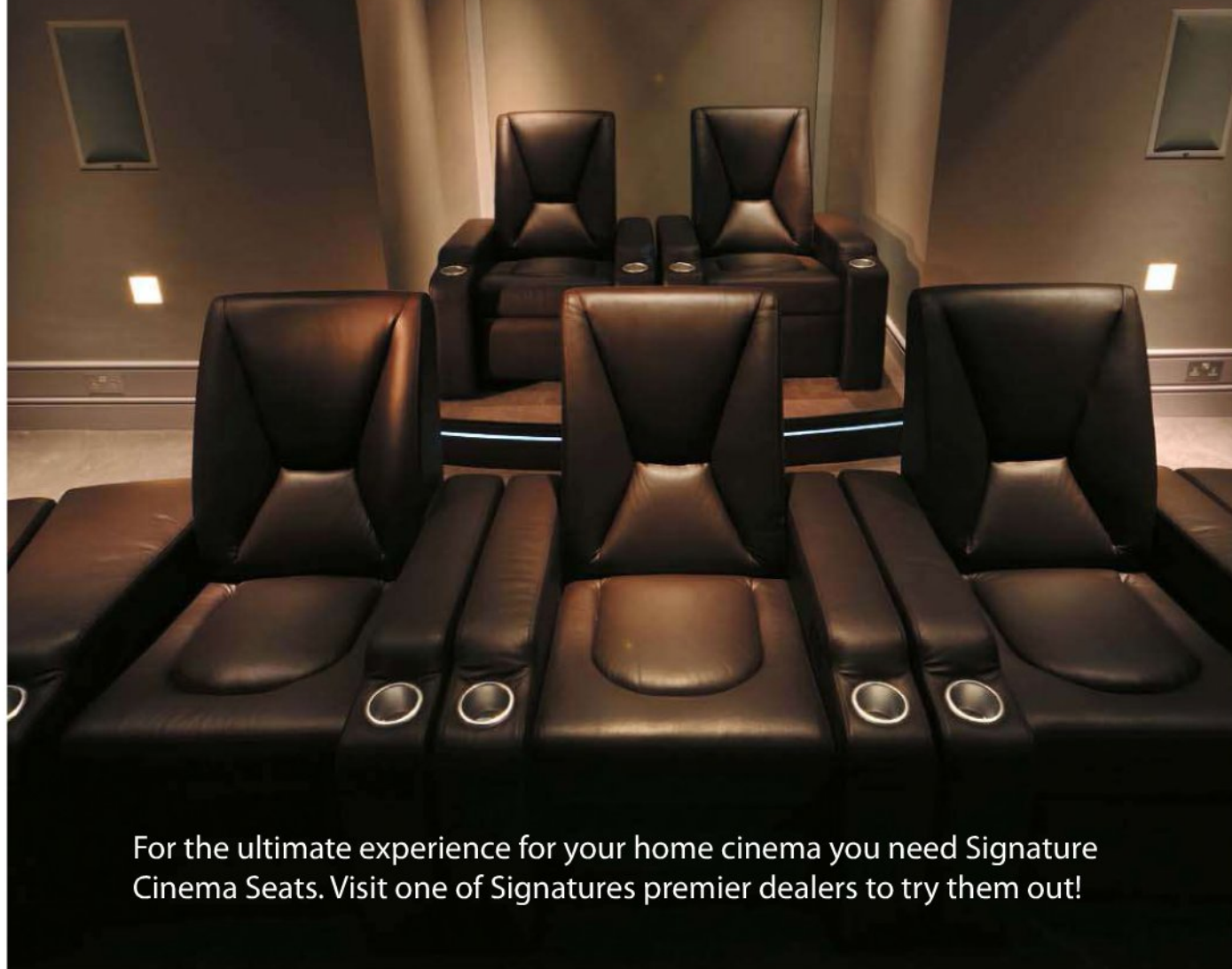
→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 140W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: No ('net only)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes, and 3 & 4
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 5-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (5.1)

Tested: Issue 172

For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews

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Speaker Systems

Best on test...



BOSTON ACOUSTICS
5.1 → VS Series
£5,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Gorgeous-looking, hi-tech 5.1 system for serious cinema

Highs: Enormous sound; scintillating HF performance
Lows: Subwoofer feels underpowered compared to surrounds

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 2 x 400, 3 x 250W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 1 x 500W
Finish: Wood; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 173

For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



PIONEER
5.1 → EX Series
£11,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

A stunning 5.1 system to match the brand's high-quality components

Highs: Breathtaking accuracy; beautiful imagery and detail; sexy design and solid build
Lows: Demands specific room placement

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 5 x 160W,
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 250W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf:
Rears (at a stretch...)

Tested: Issue 170

For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



MONITOR AUDIO
5.1 → Vector
£650 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

5.1 sub/sat system ideal for a small room home cinema

Highs: Easy to wall-mount; rugged build quality; thrilling surround sound performance
Lows: Subwoofer is punchy and fast, but lacks depth

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 5 x 80W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 100W
Finish: Matt; Bookshelf: Yes

Tested: Issue 176

For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



TEUFEL
5.1 → System 9
€4,400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Potent THX Ultra2-system with industrial styling and build

Highs: Great bass extension; huge scale and accuracy; pleasing to look at, too
Lows: Stands or wall bracket fittings are extra; subwoofer is huuuuge!

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 3 x 240W, 1 x 180W
Rears: Dipole
Subwoofer: 700W
Finish: Alu; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 166

For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



MISSION
5.1 → 79 Series
£2,400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Floor-standing system with innovative side-firing bass drivers

Highs: Sophisticated and clean-sounding; excellent stereo imagery; easy on the eye
Lows: Not the most powerful or deepest bass in its class; won't go super-loud

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 5 x 200W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 300W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf:
Rears only

Tested: Issue 171

For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews

Also Recommended...



JAMO
5.1 → A102 HCS 5
£330 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Good-value 5.1 system with living-room-friendly size/looks

Highs: Relaxed, intelligible dialogue presentation; available online for as little as £200
Lows: Subwoofer lacks real subterranean power; small satellites lend a rawness to the audio

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 5 x 60W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 200W
Finish: Cherry; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 170

For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



WHARFEDALE
5.1 → Diamond 10 HCP
£650 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Sub/sat system mixes hi-fi roots with a 10in woofer

Highs: Powerful subwoofer; exciting treble; highly musical
Lows: A little bright at high volume; might not be visceral enough for action movie fans

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 4 x 75W,
1 x 120W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 150W
Finish: Wood; Bookshelf: Yes

Tested: Issue 176

For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews



MJ ACOUSTICS
5.1 → Xeno
£800 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Stylish 5.1 sub/sat system with remarkable voice

Highs: Compact design; strong centre channel; feisty, versatile subwoofer
Lows: Lacks the scale of dispersion required for larger rooms

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 4 x 100W,
1 x 120W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 120W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf: Yes

Tested: Issue 161

For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/reviews

Editor's Choice...

KEF
5.1 → XQ Series
£5,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

This KEF 5.1 array mixes standmount surrounds with two hulking floorstanders to deliver a massive cinematic audio

experience that's hard to fault – an ideal blend of deep bass, spacious mid-band and crystal clear treble. The design is gorgeous, too – another KEF masterclass in gloss black cabinets (curved to reduce internal reflections) and clearly taking a lead from the brand's awe-inspiring Reference system. Other variants of the speakers are available, so you can spec a more affordable, smaller-room setup should you wish.

Tested: Issue 174

For price check visit: www.techradar.com/reviews

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 2 x 200W, 2 x 120W, 1 x 150W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 1 x 200W
Finish: Gloss
Bookshelf: No chance

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Subwoofers

Best on test...



BK
SW → XLS200
£290 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

10in driver married to high- and line-level inputs

Highs: Deep and extended output; disproportionately powerful; compact
Lows: Bland styling

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 22Hz-100Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 275W
Driver: 10in
Weight: 12.7kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: No
Remote control: No

Tested: Issue 151

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/reviews



MARTINLOGAN
SW → Descent i
£3,250 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Weapons-grade unit with 3 x 10in woofers

Highs: Superb engineering; Reference standard performance
Lows: Bulky and premium-priced; no automated setup

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 18Hz-120Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 500W
Driver: 3 x 10in
Weight: 47.7kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: No
Remote control: No

Tested: Issue 167

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/reviews



BOWERS & WILKINS
SW → ASW608
£300 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Compact subwoofer ideal for smaller rooms

Highs: Excellent grip and musical low-end control
Lows: Limited by its size

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 23Hz-140Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 200W
Driver: 8in
Weight: 8.85kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: No

Tested: Issue 160

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/reviews



VELODYNE
SW → DD-10
£1,900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

We love the see-thru version of this excellent bass shifter

Highs: Thrilling performance, special edition finishes
Lows: You can get more muscle for the money

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 18-120Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 1,250W
Driver: 10in
Weight: 26kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: Yes

Tested: Issue 158

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/reviews



VELODYNE
SW → SPL-1200 Ultra
From £1,400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Potent sub – now with custom finish options

Highs: Tight, powerful bass; useful auto-calibration
Lows: Few added benefits over the step-down model

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 21-120Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 1,200W
Driver: 12in
Weight: 22kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: Yes

Tested: Issue 172

For price check visit:

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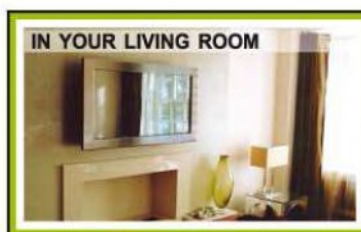
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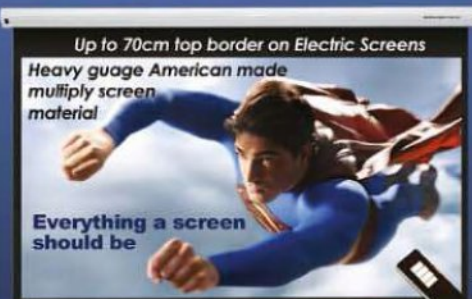
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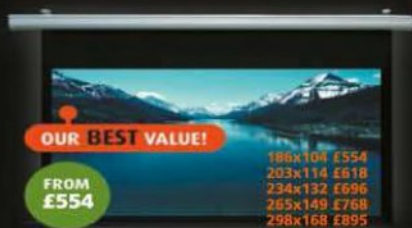
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